ROSALBA

ROSALBA:

The Story of her Development;

with other Episodes of
the European Movement,
more especially as they affected
the Monti Berici, near Vicenza,

BY

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'THE TYPEWRITER GIRL'

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TO MY KIND FRIENDS

THE CRITICS

WHOSE GENEROUS APPRECIATION OF

THE TYPEWRITER GIRL

HAS ALONE ENCOURAGED ME TO

THIS SECOND EFFORT.

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CHAPTER I

OF MEETINGS

I SAW him first on the Monti Berici, near Vicenza.

'By *him* you would say, of course, the man you were to marry.'

Now, you dear sophisticated English reader, marriage-ridden as you are, with your crystallised and stereotyped Teutonic ideas, do you indeed imagine I would thus forestall my whole tale at the outset? If you do, you are far from the Kingdom of the South; you fail to comprehend the Mediterranean temperament.

In Italy marriage is an institution; love is a romance. We do not say *him* of the man our parents design us to marry.

These words alarm you? Then read no further. I write for those who can gaze with sympathy on the warm tempestuous southern seas, not for those whose hearts are ice-bound in the sluggish straits of the north. Romance for us Italians does not find its culmination in what your English lawyers poetically describe as an ante-nuptial settlement.

I saw him first, then, I repeat, where asphodels bloom, on the Monti Berici, near Vicenza.

What manner of mischievous Italian imp I must have been at that time I can scarce remember; 'tis hard to think oneself back into one's own dim childhood. But *he* has told me, and I believe him. About ten years old; dark-haired, dark-eyed, with deep brown tints like one of Giorgione's peasants; a wild little wayward creature; lithe figure, face full of reserve and questioning wistfulness; dressed in a somewhat exaggerated Italian costume, and chattering volubly in the liquid dialect of the Venetian mainland. '*But* with a twinkle—*such* a twinkle!' he says; and you may no doubt accept his evidence. I was pert, I feel sure, and a complete stranger to reverence. To this day, indeed, I am accused of flippancy by the elephantine, stolid-eyed British matron.

We were people of some importance in our day, we Lupari—on the Monti Berici. (Pronounce our name to rhyme with *soupery* and *coopery*, if you please, not with *starry* and *shikari*.) In the first place, we were landed proprietors. Not perhaps in the same sense as the Duke of Devonshire or the Princes of Recoaro are landed proprietors; for my father's holding, I am credibly informed, though it seemed to us a perfect principality, amounted to no more than some three and a-half acres. But a land-owner is a land-owner, no matter how little land he may own: nay, the smaller his property, the greater the sense of dignity it confers. My father was a man who had a high idea of himself and his possessions. He respected the Lupari. Christian name Antonio—

which as good as showed he was an eldest son; for we lived near enough to Padua to look upon St. Antony as the chiefest of saints; so the first boy begotten in each family for miles around was always christened Antonio—except of course in the case of freemasons and free-thinkers, who named their first-born Giuseppe, after 'the glorious Garibaldi,' or else Vittorio Emanuele, after the Liberator King. 'Twas the sign of a good Catholic to make your eldest an Antonio. That last applies to these latter days alone, I need hardly say; for when my father was christened, we still groaned in Venetia under Austrian despotism: and, being all good Catholics, everybody then was alike an Antonio.

The Monti Berici rise abruptly from the boundless plain like rocky islands from the sea. They rise close above Vicenza; so close that from their steep flanks—vine-trellised, cypress-fringed—you look right down into the grey streets of the city, with all its stately, crowded palaces. The principal hill of the group we call by way of distinction *the* Monte Berico; on its bald summit stands, smouldering white in the Italian sun, the great church of the Madonna, where we children went to hear mass every Sunday morning. No church in the world was so 'grand,' we knew, as the Madonna del Monte. It had such a vast dome that when you threw back your head and gazed up into it you seemed to see the heavens opened. An arcaded path leads zigzag from the town to the portico of the sanctuary, that pilgrims as they mount may be sheltered from the heat of the day in summer. Our

house and vineyard stood quite close to these arcades, and we children used to play there on the dusty open space beside the crucifix, which is known as Al Cristo.

Mariana and I were playing there on the morning when I first saw him.

It was early spring. Snatches of perfume reached us. The bare branches of the vines, trained in long loops from tree to tree, after hanging through the winter like rusty brown ropes, were just transmuting themselves into living festoons of wan green foliage. Dainty pink tendrils with purple tips were beginning to put forth their twining fingers, and to feel about on every side for some support to clutch at. The big wistaria on our cottage wall had tumbled in wild cataracts of lilac bloom. Our neighbours' laburnums were hanging out their pendulous swaying clusters. Pyramids of white blossom transformed the horse-chestnuts into huge candelabra. It was the southern May—that golden month whose echo your northern poets have borrowed from our own, but whose soft sweet air you can never have felt till you feel it in Italy.

Mariana and I were engaged on a little difference of private judgment under the arcade by the crucifix. Mariana wanted to play at the fight with the Austrians, while I wanted to play at burying the patriots after the battle. My patch of black cloth made such a lovely catafalque! We had grown hot with discussing this moot point in our choicest dialect, not unaided by our hands—so hot, that

we hardly noticed at first the unwonted arrival of two English strangers. The epithet, indeed, may be considered superfluous, for we spoke of all *forestieri* at Vicenza as *Inglesi*.

They were of the tourist species; we knew it at once by the discriminative marks of a small red book, and a pair of opera-glasses hung in a leather case over their left shoulders. Both were young and good-looking specimens. Mariana and I fell apart to stare at them, one on each side of the covered way, so that the tourists had to walk the gauntlet up the midst between us. We stood and stared open-mouthed, with the frank and undisguised curiosity of our age and station. Mariana sucked her thumb to aid her in staring. We had not yet learned the artificial conventionalities of maidenly modesty.

I am bound to admit, however, that if we stared at the tourists, the tourists returned the stare with interest. More than that, they criticised us with charming unreserve in their own language. 'Not bad little ragamuffins!' the elder of the two remarked, with an air of vast British superiority to the mere unkempt Italian peasant. 'Picturesque enough in their way. Good pieces of colour in their head-kerchiefs and petticoats.'

How do I know what they said? Well, that is *my* business. But since it is *I* who am telling this story and *you* who are listening to it, we may as well set ourselves straight on that subject now, at the very outset. Let it be granted that 'tis impossible for

anybody really to recollect the full details of his or her own childhood. Our mental picture is made up of endless confused touches, each blurred in the outline, from the mass of which nevertheless there stands out for ourselves a clear and vivid general Impression. It is that general Impression that we wish to reproduce for others when we describe our early days: and we can only reproduce it by filling in the details a great deal more precisely than each exists in our own memories. So, in reporting these ensuing conversations, I mean to tell you, not so much what I remember to have been actually said, as what I believe or imagine was the gist of each episode. And now that we have set that matter straight once for all, I shall go on with my narrative. Do not blame my Method till you have seen my results. Bear with a beginner who is feeling her way in fear and trembling along the thorny and critic-set path of literature.

'Yes, the youngest one is pretty enough,' the other man answered, without regarding Mariana's feelings: Mariana was two years my senior. 'Her nose is a bit snubby, but otherwise she'll do. She's *piquante* at any rate. And her big black eyes are so full of wonder. I call her a characteristic Italian figure. That scarlet bow throws up her dusky skin. The eldest is commonplace. Nothing distinctive about her. Might be Seven Dials. But I have half a mind to try my hand at the little one.'

I was surprised at this, for Mariana was always much admired for her pomegranate mouth and her

long black eyelashes, while I was considered a very secondary beauty.

He pulled out a pencil as he spoke, and began jotting down something in a sketch-book which he carried. I stood with one foot held up in my hand behind me. As he looked up at me and then down at the paper from time to time, I recognised at once that he was 'taking my likeness,' and assumed a self-conscious air in consequence. As for Mariana, thus slighted, she glanced over his shoulder as the candid friend, sucking her thumb critically, and withdrawing it now and then to make uncomplimentary remarks about both sitter and artist in our native Italian. 'It's not one bit like your nose, Rosalba! *Neppur per sogno!* He can't draw as well as our boys can draw with a bit of chalk on the wall. I call him a poor creature—*non vale un soldo.* But he's making it, oh, ever so much too pretty for you, dear. If *I* were drawing you, I wouldn't put your nose the least like that. And the dress! oh, *poverino*, it's not your dress at all! It's quite ridiculous!'

'The children appear to be judges of art on the Monti Berici, Wingham,' the elder man broke in at last, with a curious smile, catching at part of our *patois*, for he knew some words of Italian. But, to our great delight, he pronounced the name of our mountain with the accent on the wrong syllable. Now, nothing amuses Italians more than the hash that foreigners make of their accents. I burst out laughing in his face. 'He says *Beri'ci*, Mariana, instead of *Be'rici*,' I cried in derision.

The elder man, in grey, whose name we had observed was Stodmarsh, coloured up strongly as I spoke. I did not discover till much later in life that he fancied himself as an Italian scholar, and gave himself airs with his friend the artist on the strength of his supposed mastery of the choicest Tuscan. 'Ha! it's pronounced *Berry-chy*, then, not *Ber-eechy*,' he said in a short snappy voice, collusively crushing. 'That's the worst of these local Italian names; one never can know beforehand what the people of the place are going to call them. The error, of course, is natural. It has no more to do with knowledge of the language, *as* such, than the pronunciation of some of our English local names has to do with a man's fitness to lecture on Shakespeare. Me-opham in Kent, for example, is pronounced Meppam, and Bovey in Devonshire is simply Buvvy.'

The younger man took no notice of his friend's remark, which did not seem to interest him, but went on sketching my face and figure in different attitudes. I danced about accordingly. 'I shan't have such another chance again, perhaps,' he observed in explanation, holding his book at arm's length and examining his work critically with his head on one side. 'She wears the native costume, which is so rare nowadays. Besides, the little flibberty-gibbet's pretty!'

'Has character too,' the other added.

'Yes; that small, mobile, daintily protruding chin always means character—a strong will, but cap-

ricious. It is a whimsical chin. She will live to fascinate.'

The elder man regarded him with contemptuous toleration. 'Well, I hope you won't be long,' he said, casting an eye towards the white dome of the Madonna del Monte. 'I particularly wish to see this Montagna in the church; it's starred in Baedeker. That's one of the worst faults I have to find with you painter fellows, Wingham. You come to Italy, the fatherland of art, and yet you think more of making your own wretched little modern sketches than of looking at all the wonderful works the *really* big men have bequeathed to humanity. I pointed that out in London, when we were starting on this trip. A fellow I know said to me at the club, "How nice for you that Arthur Wingham is going with you! It must be *such* an advantage to visit Italy in company with an artist!" And I answered, "Don't you believe it, my dear sir. I know what Wingham will be doing all the time. Instead of standing awe-struck before Michael Angelo and Raphael, he'll be fidgeting over little studies of his own every minute —picturesque small beggar-children"'—he waved his hand demonstratively towards Mariana and me—'"or red-sailed fishing-boats off the quays at Venice!"'

The man in brown, called Wingham, closed his sketch-book hastily. 'You're right, Stodmarsh,' he answered, colouring up in turn, for he was naturally sensitive. 'You touch it with a needle. It makes me ashamed to think I should be scribbling wretched sketches, which I could do in London, after

all, when this may be my one chance of seeing Italy.'

He popped the book into his pocket, securely fastened by its elastic band, and moved on towards the big church. We danced around them as they went. 'Let us see the Montagna,' he continued, slowly, 'which is starred in Baedeker.' He fell into a vein. 'Think of that! Starred in Baedeker!—And yet, after all, Montagna was young once, I suppose, and wandered on these hills, just like us, in spring-time, and made sketches and studies of peasants and their heads—and was not yet an old master, nor starred in Baedeker.' He paused for a second and gazed at the great grey town. 'No man, when one comes to think of it, Stodmarsh, is *born* ready-starred—except, of course, St. Dominic: he has to *earn* his star; and when he has earned it even from the judicious Baedeker, you look at him and admire him. But would you have admired Montagna, that's the question'—he struck his stick on the ground—'before Baedeker existed: when he was wandering on these slopes, with a sketch-book in his pocket, jotting notes as he went of sun-brown Italian children?'

The man in grey looked huffy. 'Oh, if you intend to be didactic,' he interposed, 'and satirical as well, I think we had better make straight for the church. Satire is *not* your forte. I prefer even your thumb-nail sketches to your satire.'

I have said that they were both young. The one called Wingham I judged to be about twenty—at

least, he looked of an age with Gabriele Valmarano, whom we knew to be over nineteen. The other, Stodmarsh (who had a squarer and more portly figure, very thick-set for his years), I imagined to be twenty-two or thereabouts. Arthur Wingham had poetical features and a budding black moustache—mere lines faintly pencilled on his upper lip—which he caressed somewhat oftener than its size seemed to justify. John Stodmarsh was close-shaven, with a solid chin and that clear-cut, logical, *doctrinaire* type of face which in the lower ranks of life betokens a coachman, and in the upper a political economist. I know that now; at the time I only thought it most sober and quizzical.

They strolled into the church, and presumably proceeded to examine the Montagna, whatever that might be. Mariana and I trooped in close after them, as is the nature of Italian childhood; when *forestieri* came to admire our Madonna, we always accompanied them to watch the effect our sanctuary produced. We also wanted to discover this mysterious Montagna, of which till then we had never heard. But we soon came to the conclusion that our tourists' knowledge of Italian must be extremely slight; for they went straight up to the old-fashioned altar-piece on the right of the high altar, and began staring hard at the queer dark picture and calling *it* the Montagna. Now, we knew very well this was nothing of the sort; for 'twas really Our Lady and the blessed saints mourning over the dead body of the Signore, which we speak

of as a Pietà. The elementary religious ignorance these *Inglesi* displayed in calling *that* a Montagna surprised and shocked us. But we remembered what mother had often told us, that most Englishmen were atheists.

What made the impression still more painful was the duplicity of old Giuseppe, the sacristan; for that bad old man, hearing the *forestieri* describe this Pietà as a Montagna, aided and abetted them in their error with base compliance, instead of withstanding them to their faces, as I had done in the matter of the word *Berici*. He murmured in acquiescence, '*Si, si*; Montagna,' and wagged his shaky head sapiently, and waited about, rubbing his hands, in expectation of a few sous, with a mendacious servility that quite astonished us. For we knew he understood perfectly well that this was really the Blessed Madonna and the dead Signore; since he had often explained the meaning of the picture to us, and had even told us which of the grand ladies around was the blessed Magdalen, with her alabaster box of ointment, very precious, and which was San Giovanni, and which Giuseppe of Arimathea, his patron and name-sake. We were Italians, and our respect for truth was not quixotic; we handled it carelessly ourselves at times: but this cringing concession to the ignorance and prejudice of the stranger heretics—merely because they were known to be dispensers of *soldi*—set our patriot backs up.

Still, we sauntered round the big, bare church,

following the man Stodmarsh, who stalked about in the most business-like way, with his little red book in his hand, reading every line as he went, and evidently engaged in the favourite tourist pursuit of verifying Baedeker. We could see at a glance *he* was a tourist who understood his trade; because he stopped the proper length of time, as by custom established, no more and no less, before each separate statue or altar-piece. Strangers, we knew, always stood longest and gazed up hardest before the soaring work that Giuseppe described as the Mass of St. Gregory; they also listened with marked attention while he related in devious detail how it had been torn to shreds by godless revolutionists and then neatly mended again. We knew that story by heart, and could have repeated it word for word in the same quavering recitative as old Giuseppe, throwing in the explanatory nods and waves of the hand at all the right points, so as to make it more comprehensible to the poor ignorant *forestieri*. Now, Stodmarsh went round and looked and listened at each of the wonted places, according to Baedeker and old Giuseppe; so we could tell at once *he* was a traveller who knew something about travel. He understood how the Madonna del Monte ought to be visited by one who wished to fulfil the whole duty of a tourist!

But the man in brown, called Wingham, how he puzzled us! Instead of walking once right round the church, as he ought to have done, and stopping like a docile pupil wherever Giuseppe told

him, so as to admire the proper things in due proportion, this singular person spent a ridiculously long time standing before the picture of Our Lady and the Signore, with his mouth half-open, and staring at it as Maso, the idiot of the hill, stares at passers-by when he doesn't recognise them. He kept gazing at it first from one side and then from the other, with his hand shading his eyes: standing near it now, and then far away from it; peering close into parts of it that were quite uninteresting, and catching bits of the background (where there were no figures at all) in different lights, after the silliest fashion. Mariana and I stood behind, and tittered and giggled. It was quite clear this young man knew absolutely nothing about the complete art of being a tourist. He behaved so foolishly that Mariana took pity upon his innocence and stupidity at last, and pointing to the figure in the centre of the picture said distinctly, '*Questa è la Santissima Maddalena!*' at which the man in brown only smiled, and answered softly in very doubtful Italian, '*Si, si*, my child, I know; but just look at her robe; how exquisitely, how superbly that hem is painted!' Then we both tittered again, because he not only used the wrong word for *hem*, but also made it feminine!

After he had finished with the Pietà (from which he withdrew his eyes with a regretful air, because Stodmarsh called him), he walked all round the church, not looking at the right things at all, and muttering wearily, 'Yes, yes!' when Giuseppe

directed his attention to the Mass of St. Gregory, but stopping now and then to examine some rose-marble column or some alabaster relief of odd little saints in the act of martyrdom—things which no tourist before had ever admired—sometimes even things that Mariana and I, who were not tourists at all, used to look at with interest because they were so funny. 'Very quaint!' he called them. His delight in these trifles justly annoyed better-informed Mr. Stodmarsh, who kept on calling out, 'Come on, come on! You know we have still to see Palladio's Rotonda.' And Wingham answered almost angrily, 'Oh, confound Palladio, and confound his Rotonda!' Indeed—and here I *trust* my memory—he used a stronger expression, which that artificially cultivated maidenly modesty I spoke about just now prevents me from transcribing. But still, he used it. Maidenly modesty may conceal facts; it cannot alter them. As for old Giuseppe, he fingered his stubbly chin, and eyed the man in brown as one eyes a suspected lunatic.

Of course we followed them out of the church as we had followed them into it. We did not want to be obtrusive, but we always held it a point of hospitality personally to conduct the stranger round the Monti Berici. We would not even have grudged trailing after our new friends as far as the station at Vicenza, so high was our sense of our duty towards the foreigner. But outside the church, after he had dropped half a franc into Giuseppe's expectant though unwashed palm, the man in brown paused

again and stared at me. 'I *must* have another try at that child,' he exclaimed in an apologetic voice, half-turning to Stodmarsh. 'I can't quite catch the little sprite. Her face is so elusive!'

I did not feel sure whether to be called a sprite and described as elusive was complimentary or otherwise; but I gave my tourist the benefit of the doubt and, showing my white row of Italian teeth, smiled on him benignly.

This was too much for Mariana, who was always considered prettier than me, and whose vanity was hurt because the artist had not sketched *her* demure face as well as my roguish one; so she gave me a push on the church steps which nearly knocked me over.

I recovered my balance with dignity, and determined that this conduct should not be repeated. I looked right into her eyes, therefore, and observed with spirit in my shrillest voice—

'*Naow, then, Marier-Ann, if you do that agin, I shall gao stright in an' tell your mother!*'

CHAPTER II

AFTER THE EXPLOSION

THESE few simple words—spoken I am assured in a fine cockney accent—produced an effect upon our tourists which fairly astonished us.

Arthur Wingham stood still and gazed at me, with his mouth agape, as he had gazed at the Pietà. One might have imagined he had never heard anybody speak English before, so breathless was his amazement. He fell back a pace or two, and regarded me with fixed eyes. Then he stammered out in a slow voice, 'Why—this child—is a Londoner!'

I drew myself up very straight and replied with dignity, 'Of course I 'm a Londoner!'

Pride has ever been my besetting sin. I was proud of my birth as I was proud of my ancestry.

'Then you 're not Italian at all!' he went on, observing me with a subdued air of pained regret. He seemed to think I had succeeded in getting my portrait drawn under false pretences.

'Of course I 'm Italian!' I answered again, cutting a quick little caper which ought alone to have vouched for my nationality. To a child of ten, everything is 'of course.' He or she expects the

stranger to know what to him or her is a familiar piece of common knowledge.

John Stodmarsh, knitting his brows, brought his logical intelligence to bear upon the problem. 'Oh, I see,' he interposed, with an air of conviction. 'Don't you catch at it, Wingham? These are organ-grinders' children.'

Organ-grinders, indeed! The blood of the Lupari boiled within me. 'My Pa's *not* an organ-grinder!' I cried, just indignation finding words spontaneously.

'He was employed at Gatti's,' Mariana added with a saucy toss of her pretty head: for in the poor Italian colony in London, whose feelings we still retained, to be employed at Gatti's was as a patent of nobility. It distinguished one immediately from the vendors of ice-cream, or the purveyors of works of art in plaster of Paris.

'Ah, just so. A waiter!' John Stodmarsh put in; and we both hated him for it: for our papa had been a grand gentleman in a black tail-coat and a white tie in London—so grand, indeed, that we children were not even allowed to nod recognition if we met him in his official dress near the Adelaide Gallery. It hurt our tenderest feelings that this mere tourist in a grey tweed suit—a common crush-hatted, red-book-ridden tourist—should say 'A waiter!' in such a contemptuous tone of so grand a personage. The blood of the Lupari rose once more to 212 Fahrenheit.

'He was a waiter *in London*,' Mariana put in—I have no doubt what she really said was more like 'witer'; 'but he has retired from business'—she

swelled with conscious importance, for Mariana always thought a great deal of herself and her family —'and now, he is a landowner here on the Monte Berico.'

John Stodmarsh looked at Arthur Wingham. Arthur Wingham looked at John Stodmarsh. Then both burst out laughing. Stodmarsh's laugh was stolid British; the painter's was shy; it proceeded rather from embarrassment than from amusement.

'But if so—you have understood all we said,' he stammered out abruptly.

He spoke in so regretful a tone that I forgave him at once for having called my poor little nose 'a bit snubby.' He was clearly ashamed of himself. Though it was the unrepentant Stodmarsh, after all, who had ventured to describe us as 'picturesque little Italian beggar-children.'

'Of course,' Mariana answered with a becoming curl of her supercilious lip—whatever else I may have said or thought of Mariana, I have never denied that she was and is extremely pretty. 'Ain't we born Londoners?'

Arthur Wingham's confusion and vexation were manifest. 'It never occurred to me, Stodmarsh,' he said in a low voice, turning to his friend, 'that these children could possibly understand English.'

'Oh, it doesn't much matter,' Stodmarsh answered, lighting a cigarette. 'Though we might have known —p'f, p'f—they were not likely to be real Italians, they 're so theatrically Italian in dress and get-up.'

I flared once more. 'We *are* real Italians' I

exclaimed aggressively. 'My Pa's a Garibaldian.' I fired the fact point-blank at him, like a Martini-Henry.

'Revolutionary ruffians!' the man in grey responded, between his puffs.

'How long have you lived here?' the artist asked, still hot and uneasy.

'Two years,' I answered. 'But, all the same, we ain't forgotten London.'

This will fully explain to you, I hope, how it was that we understood what the tourists said to one another. Also, you may now perhaps perceive why I did not unfold as much to you from the first; which casts light on my Method. (Every novelist nowadays cultivates a Method.) If I had told you at the beginning, the revelation would have lacked the element of surprise. And that further demonstrates, as has been remarked before, how Wisdom is justified of all her children.

'Our Ma's English,' Mariana observed, looking up at the two astonished men with her coquettish eyes wide open.

'At least, she's Irish,' I corrected. I was aware that a caste difference separated Irish from English; and, while anxious to uphold the honour of the Lupari, I did not desire to bolster it up under false pretences.

'Noble London twangs they've got, certainly,' Stodmarsh remarked in a patronising aside. I winced, but recognised that he owed me a return for my open ridicule of his pronunciation of Berici.

And noble London twangs we *had*, no doubt. I cannot deny it. Still, I will not endeavour here to reproduce our peculiar form of speech as it existed at that moment. I am not an adept in the cockney tongue; I have forgotten it as utterly as the Tichborne Claimant forgot his French, and could scarcely now write it down correctly, were it but as a literary exercise. Years of intercourse with cultivated speakers, both in English and in Italian, have so killed that past, alike for Mariana and for me, that we fail even to recall it accurately. Everybody who has heard Mariana in Gounod's *Faust* knows how exquisitely clear and pure are 'The Lupari's' pronunciation and articulation in either of our alternative mother tongues. But we must then have spoken like all our neighbours. Indeed, when I first revisited the Monti Berici in my later days, I had difficulty in understanding what my old friends the Valmarani and the Rodari said to me. You must forgive me, therefore, if, after the one specimen of our speech which I first flung before your eyes, I abstain from the attempt to write out our childish sayings in the now unfamiliar cockney dialect.

I will further confess that even that one little specimen itself is not wholly due to my unaided memory. There still exists, framed and hung on the wall of Arthur Wingham's studio, a stray page from his first Italian sketch-book: it contains a rough drawing of a wild and stray-haired Vicenzan girl, in native costume, wearing an ineffable expression of monkeyish perversity; beneath which are inscribed

those precise words, taken down on the spot, 'Naow, then, Marier-Ann, if you do that agin, I shall gao stright in an' tell your mother.' By means of this priceless piece of documentary evidence saved from the wreck of years, as well as by my own and the painter's memories, I have pieced together the scene as I now relate it for you.

'But this is very interesting,' Arthur Wingham continued, in a reflective voice. 'I never thought of that before. Italy must swarm with returned emigrants—people who have made money in England, and who bring back their children, practically as English boys and girls, to Lombardy or Tuscany.'

'I went to Leather Lane Board-School,' Mariana chimed in, anxious to show that she had had the advantage of the best education. 'Rosalba didn't. She wasn't big enough.' And she looked down on me from her majestic height of three inches taller with a calm expression of cultivated compassion.

'So this is Rosalba?' the artist mused, laying his hand on my head—and I felt proud of the recognition. 'Then *your* name's Marier-Ann?' He glanced inquiry at my sister.

'No, it ain't,' Mariana replied, colouring up. 'That's only what the girls used to call me in London. Rosalba calls me so still, when we speak English together, on purpose to rile me. My proper name's Mariana Lupari. We talk English to one another when we don't want these Italian folks to understand us.'

For we stood, we two, on a rare and select pinnacle

above the rest of the world—poised aloft between heaven and earth as natural international aristocrats. From our Mother's teaching, we had learned to despise the mere Italian as an inferior creature; from our Father's, and indeed from the universal opinion of the Monti Berici, we had grown to look upon Englishmen (represented in our midst only by tourists who toiled painfully up our hill to visit the Madonna del Monte) as an awkward race of ignorant barbarians, seldom able to understand the most elementary Italian, but flocking day after day in some aimless fashion to stare at the same familiar objects with the same bland grin, and to worry us with the same endless and imbecile questions. Mariana and I felt sick of directing the bewildered creatures from the door of the Madonna to the Rotonda Palladiana, along a road well known to every child in the parish.

The consequence was that we looked down upon the Italians because they were not English, and looked down upon the English because they were silly ignoramuses.

Our new friends seated themselves on the parapet by the arcades, where green lizards basked in the sun, and began to draw us out. We were extremely ductile. It flattered our vanity to be treated as centres of interest; and the tourists in grey and brown were obviously interested in us. We told them everything about our family and friends, magnifying not a little the ancestral grandeur and wealth of the Lupari, and expatiating on the fact

that when we lived in London our Papa had a clean white shirt-front every day of the week, and wore a tie exactly like an English padre's. We also dwelt with pride upon the extent and beauty of our landed possessions—four acres, nearly—and on our Papa's connection with the famous General Garibaldi. Mariana talked most, being now well warmed up to a congenial theme; the tourists sat and laughed at all her sallies. The more they laughed, the more she spurred her active imagination. Before she had finished, I think our Papa had been elevated into a colonel on Garibaldi's staff, and was shown by facts to have been mainly instrumental in driving certain strange wild beasts known as Austrians out of Lombardy and Venice.

Her talk was so racy and so irresponsible—for Mariana has never allowed her fancy to be restricted by petty considerations of conformity to fact—that even John Stodmarsh forgot for a time his desire to see everything that was starred in Baedeker, and loitered and laughed through the precious half-hours that ought to have been conscientiously devoted to the crumbling inanities of the Rotonda Palladiana. The smell of wine-vats hung on the air: the cicalas shrilled to us. We might have stood there before them all day, cutting capers and making antic faces for Arthur Wingham's sketch-book, or chasing grasshoppers to their holes with wild shrieks of laughter, had not our Mother happened to notice our prolonged absence, and therefore to suspect the intervention of tourists, our usual

tempters from the path of duty. She hurried up the hill, breathless. 'An' for phwat didn't ye come home to yer dinner?' she asked us angrily.

Mariana mounted her high horse. 'We have been showing the church to a couple of English gentlemen,' she answered with her habitual dignity.

Mother surveyed the intruders with mitigated scorn. An English gentleman she respected—in his proper place, Pall Mall; 'but phwat would they be wanting coming to these outlandish counthries,' she used to exclaim, 'searching out tumble-dhown disrepairious churches, whan there's foiner buildings to be seen in London than in the length and breadth of this blessed Italy?' It always surprised Mother to think that his Holiness should consint to live in Rome, when 'twas Ould Oireland that would have been glad to extind him the roight hand of welcome. If I am to be entirely frank (as I desire to be in these personal memoirs), I must admit that among the people for whom Mariana and I had a condescending contempt I cannot refrain from reckoning my Mother. As Londoners and Englishwomen, we were sadly conscious of her taint of mere Irishry.

The tourists, however, succeeded in engaging her agreeably in conversation. My Mother was affable, when affably approached. She imparted to them her views on the Italian situation. Was it neighbours, indeed? Shure, who would want to go an' mix theirselves up with a jabberin' pack of beggarly Italians? (As representatives of the ancestral Lupari, we resented this insult to our ancient land from a mere

Irishwoman like Mother.) Barrin' the priest—an' wasn't even the priest hisself, God bless him, an Italian? —who would she be afther wanting to speak to in all Veechentzer? Her husband?—yes, her husband was an Italian too; but thin, that was different. Hadn't he lived in England, an' inculcated English habits, an' larned to spake like a Crischun? Whoile these other Italians, who had nivver been furder off nor Veechentzer in their loives—who could understand what they said, bar the childer? Oh, yes, the childer spoke Italian, as you moight say to the manner born; but for herself, bein' a lady, she wouldn't bemane herself to spake it. She kept herself *to* herself; and she laid so profound an accent on that impressive *to* that I am not quite sure I ought not spell it t-double-o.

In these later years, looking back upon that remote past through a mist of time, I find it hard to realise that the queer little savage who made dust-pies, and charmed cicalas from their crannies, and performed the obsequies of the patriot dead, and accosted strangers on the Monte Berico, was really myself, or that the curious uprooted Irishwoman who regarded all Italy as an outlandish desert was really my Mother. I seem to look back upon it all as upon some vague story I once read in my childhood. The truth is, we cannot disentangle ourselves from our acquired personalities; and to me in Venetia now — dear campanile-sprinkled, rose-embowered, mulberry-leaved Venetia—all that early life appears to have been passed in some other country. The

reason is, I saw Vicenza then, half with the eyes of a London street child, half with those of an Italian peasant; I see it now, if you will pardon my saying so, with the eyes of an educated English lady.

The gulf is so immense that I bridge it with difficulty.

It was the same with my Father's trade. At the present day, I can order lunch with equanimity at any other restaurant in London—but not at Gatti's. I speak in a hushed voice to Gatti's waiters. I *know* what great gentlemen they are, and I feel afraid to call for lobster mayonnaise and a flask of Chianti without apologetic deference. Are they not philanthropists in disguise, who serve tables from a sense of duty?

For a like reason, you must provisionally forgive my picture of my Mother. Do not chide me for unfilial frankness. It is not my fault if I have outgrown my surroundings. Besides, to explain all just now would be premature—the grammarians say, proleptic. I must ask you to wait, as part of my Method.

'Is it to show ye the way to the Rotonda?' Mother admitted at last, in answer to a request of John Stodmarsh's. 'An' phwat for would ye want to see the Rotonda at all at all? 'Tis the desolate tumble-dhown edifice it is, for anny one in their sinses to go an' visit. They'll be charging ye half a lira to show the place to ye, an' sorra a thing is there in it to show that ye wouldn't foind better anny day in London. Shure, phwat English gintlefolks would

come to see Italy for whan they might be visiting the grand majestic scaynery of the west coast of Oireland, wid the mountains an' the clouds an' the ruined great historic castles of the ould Oirish kings, is a thing that annybody with a brain in their heads moight wondher at. But 'tis the Lord's doing, an' no mistake, that whan ye won't go insoide a Cahtholic church at home, ye'll come abroad of yer own free will to sake for them, and so have the seeds of the thrue religion instilled unbeknown to yerselves widin ye.—Is it the Rotonda ye want? The childer will show ye the way to the Rotonda, if ye must waste your money on a delapidated ruinatious unsoightly buildin'; but moind ye come back sthraight from the door, Mariana, an' bring along Rosalba, or it's the palm of me hand will be makin' better acquaintance wid ye.'

We nodded assent and guided them to the Rotonda, which was indeed, as Mother had said, a dilapidated ruinatious place, with damp peeling plaster, and shabby time-stained Ionic colonnades—a hall of past splendours, sinking fast to the final stage of Italian decay. At the lichen-eaten doorway by the main entrance our tourists knocked and paid their half-lira. We children drew back, unable to accompany them within that mysterious portal, on whose threshold we had stood and peeped in vain so often. Arthur Wingham laid his hand on my head once more before he passed through the doorway. 'Good-bye, Rosalba!' he said kindly. 'Good-bye, Mariana! I have got your portraits here, and

some day they shall hang on gallery walls in London!'

John Stodmarsh gave Mariana half a franc, but said nothing.

As we hastened home, mindful of Mother's threat (which was no idle verbiage), I said to Mariana, 'I like the one in brown best. *È più carino.* He spoke so nice to us.'

Mariana curled her disdainful lip. 'The one in grey gave me ten soldi,' she answered.

So they faded out of our lives. Perhaps, save for what happened long afterwards, and especially for the accident of Arthur Wingham's sketch-book, these two tourists might even have dropped for ever from my memory, like all the other tourists who, day after day, mopped their foreheads on the steep arcaded path up the shadowless hill, and spoke evil freely of the Italian sun, and stared open-mouthed at the Mass of St. Gregory, as old Giuseppe, that authority on art, directed them to do in the Madonna del Monte.

CHAPTER III

I MAKE A DISCOVERY

A DOMESTIC critic—God bless him !—who is peering over my shoulder as I write, and attempting to interfere with the originality of my work, here raises an objection. 'If you cannot recollect your own dialect, my child,' he says, 'how comes it that you can so perfectly recollect your Mother's ?'

Now, I call that objection silly. It shows a man's usual lack of power to project himself into somebody else's situation. *Of course* I can recollect my Mother's dialect: I stood outside it; I could observe and criticise it. Even at that age, Mariana and I, being irreverent chits, used to mimic it with success. But my own dialect formed part of myself; I was not aware that I talked cockney; I thought I talked English. In later days I outgrew my accent by slow degrees through intercourse with more refined and cultivated speakers; but I never *knew* I was outgrowing it; and now I cannot even reproduce it tolerably by an effort of memory. Will that satisfy you, stupid ?

Our life on the Monti Berici—to return from this digression—is the earliest stage which I can recall

with distinctness. Perhaps I see it through the golden mist of childhood. We had very good times there, Mariana and I. Very good times on the whole, though Mother *was* trying. We attended the communal school, where I learned to read and write Italian. Mariana, for her part, had learned to read and write English in London; she gave herself airs on the strength of the supposed superiority of the Leather Lane Board-School, which was extremely 'grand,' and where she alone had gone, to the one we both shared on the Monte Berico. 'Grand' was always Mariana's pet epithet of commendation; it mirrored an ideal. I picked it up from her, though I never quite assimilated the feeling it embodied. Nowadays, Mariana no longer speaks of things as 'grand'; she has outgrown that adjective. But she loves them 'smart'—which is, after all, a distinction without much difference.

By Mariana's aid I learned to read English too, though I could never quite get over the topsy-turvy insular silliness of the English mode of printing, which puts e's for i's, and a's for e's in the weirdest fashion. However, I conquered this erratic orthography; I managed to master the strange system of conventions by which many letters were made to do duty for a single sound, while many sounds were attached, *en revanche*, to a single letter. The conquest of written English thus achieved put me in a position to read all the literature our house afforded. Our library was not large, and chance had selected it; but, considering our position, it was choice and

liberal. We had the *Life of Giuseppe Garibaldi* in Italian, and the *Famous Murders*, and two startling paper-covered sensational novels whose honoured names, like their author's, have escaped me. In English we had *The Path to Paradise*, and the *Life of St. Theresa*, and the *Cornhill Magazine* for June 1870, and a fragmentary copy of *The Cook's Companion.*

All these were profoundly interesting in varied ways—especially the last; it opened up such vistas of unimagined luxury. But there were three other books on the kitchen shelf which I much preferred to them.

One had lost its cover, though it retained its title-page. It was called *The Thousand and One Nights; A New Translation.* What 'A New Translation' might mean I had not the slightest idea; Giuseppe thought it referred obscurely to the body of some saint: but I loved that book; something strange and foreign in it, as of another world, took hold of my fancy. I had no conception what a Caliph was, though I gathered from the text that he was a very 'grand' gentleman, even grander than the Sindaco; nor had I the dimmest glimmering of what was meant by a sultana, or a mosque, or a dervish, or a dromedary. But I knew that Islam was the right faith which everybody in that world ought to hold, like the Holy Church in ours; and I was no more shocked by the heterodoxy of the book than I was shocked in fairy-tales by the complete absence of any mawkish modern morality. 'So he out with

his sword, and cut off the old woman's head, and then went on with his journey singing.' In that tolerant spirit—the true spirit of literature—I accepted the *Thousand and One Nights*, not even knowing that they were called Arabian. For me, they dropped from the clouds; I think I suspected them of belonging rather to the moon or the stars than to any mere terrestrial Araby or Egypt.

The second book among my favourite books was also in English. It had neither cover nor title-page, so I did not know who wrote it. Indeed, I fancy I had not yet arrived at the point of understanding that books were written by somebody; I accepted them just as books—a natural product, like music or strawberries. This second book was quite unlike the *Thousand and One Nights*; it did not tell a tale outright, by means of narrative, but made a number of separate speakers say each his own part, so that by putting all together you arrived at last at a comprehension of what was happening. Still, it was like the *Thousand and One Nights* in this—that it did not tell a single story alone, but several. Each of these stories had a name of its own; those I liked best were called 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' 'Roméo and Juliet,' 'As You Like It,' and 'The Merry Wives of Windsor.' There was also a lovely tale whose name was 'The Tempest'; but, unfortunately, the first few scenes of that were torn out, like the title-page, so I could never make out how Ferdinand and his companions were stranded on the island. 'Julius Cæsar' was good, though I thought it too much like the *Famous*

Murders, but 'Hamlet' was sad trash; while all the Henries (except one with Falstaff in it) were too dull for anything. Oddest of all, though the book was in English, almost every name and scene was Italian! Roméo lived at a place called Verona, whose white towers we could make out in fine weather from the Madonna del Monte; while that wicked man, Shylock, was a Jew in Venice, and Portia came from Padua, where Father used to go from time to time to confer with the Party. It shocked me afterwards to learn that in England everybody mispronounced Roméo's name as 'Romeo.'

The third book, which I loved best of all, was written in Italian—very old and quaint and grandiose Italian. It also had lost both cover and title; but it was, oh, in *beautiful* verse, and extremely orthodox. No Islam there, no Koran, but the Christian epic. It told one all about Heaven and Hell and Purgatory, and—this was its chief charm—it was composed by somebody who had really been there. That made it so interesting; because, though our own priest knew a great deal about Heaven and Hell, it was only at second-hand, from books and pictures. But the signore in the poetry-book—a saturnine, disdainful, bitter-tongued gentleman—had actually *seen* everything he described, and knew precisely what each floor of Hell was made of. I liked them all, and read them all eagerly. Heaven I thought just a trifle vague—a somewhat shadowy Paradiso. Hell, on the contrary, had a fiery and icy materiality about

it that was quite convincing—a most vivid Inferno. Purgatory I despised as fit only for people who had the courage neither of their sins nor of their virtues. I hate half-measures. Give *me* a harp and crown, or to wallow with Ugolino!

These three books formed the basis of my education. Only long after did I learn how fortunate I had been in having for the constant companions of my childhood Shakespeare, Dante, and the nameless but immortal Egyptians. I carried them out on the hillside, and read them where hedges of box and cypress breathed their resinous breath in the sunshine. By their aid I learned to converse with fairies and goddesses.

Mariana was not so fond of reading as I was. Her aims were more social. I cared most for the things of the mind. It was Mariana's idea to get on in life; she wanted to know the Cicolari who lived lower down the hill, and were distinguished people in the retail oil trade, with seventeen acres of good olive-terrace. Ermite Cicolari waited about when she passed the oil-press, and opened his saucer eyes at her. Mariana used to flit by as though she never noticed him.

We both loved the Madonna del Monte. It taught us much. We loved the sunlight that lurked in the hollows of the soaring dome; the great guttering candles that flared before the altar; the ministrants in their lace-edged garb of scarlet and white; the odorous air, heavy with the fumes that rose in blue curls from the swinging censers; the monks in

brown robes with cowl and sandals; the organ that pealed to the echoing roof: all was rife with mystery. I pity English children who have never known those solemn joys of the sanctuary. They colour life for one.

Mother and Father were also an element of education to us. I am not ashamed to say I learnt from Mother the first rudiments of the literary habit. She had the ordinary rich vocabulary of the Irish peasant —a trifle florid, it is true, and not always quite correct in the employment of words, but still graphic, profuse, and varied. She knew, I think, every noun and adjective in the English language, and she strung them together with fatal and fluent familiarity. In verbs, to be sure, she was weak: but her choice of epithets left nothing to desire save applicability. Mariana laughed at her; for myself, I secretly admired and still admire the ease and smoothness with which she could pour forth her torrent floods of largiloquent Celtic rhetoric. Her style lacked reserve; it erred, if at all, in the direction of exuberance. It would have been better for stern and judicious pruning. But what it wanted in terseness it almost made up in picturesque confusion. And 'tis beyond a doubt that vocabulary, when all is said and done, lies at the root of literature. We who write are by trade phrasemongers.

Of Father we saw less. He was an idealist, was Father. I suppose those of you who have only met the waiter at Gatti's in his professional capacity *as* waiter at Gatti's would hardly associate idealism

with the restaurant in the Strand. But there they would show a grievous class-narrowness. Idealism is a product of temperament, not a result of vocation, or even of association. In Italy's need, my Father had returned from his comfortable berth in London to join Garibaldi's volunteers on the great revolutionist's last wild expedition, and had been wounded in the leg with a severe wound, which lamed him for life and afforded him thenceforward the ceaseless joy of knowing that he had shed his blood (to the extent of at least two table-spoonfuls) on behalf of the Fatherland. Now that he had retired to his three acres, he busied himself mostly with the culture of the vine ; but he was also an important personage in the Party, for whose sake he paid frequent visits to Padua. We children knew little about the Party; but we understood in some vague way that it was profoundly necessary for the salvation of the Fatherland, and that without it Italy would be given over, bound hand and foot, to some wicked people known as the *borghesia* or *bourgeoisie*. I have since inferred that Father was a socialist; but as we lived in daily fear of the vengeance of the *borghesi*, we never used that word ourselves on the Monti Berici; the sole phrase we knew was that of 'the Party.'

Personally, a gentler revolutionist than my Father I never saw. He stabbed with difficulty, and guillotined his opponents in dumb show only. He would stop short in his fiercest denunciation of kings, priests, and the black hearts of capitalists, to lay one hand tenderly on my curly head, and say with his expan-

sive smile, 'There, run away, *Rosalba mia!* Run away, my little one! These serious matters are not for such as thee. Dreamer of dreams, what dost thou know of politics? *Non sono per te!* Go, pluck thyself a bunch of the ripe black grapes, the biggest thou canst find, on the sunny side of the pergola, and set thyself down in the mulberry shade to eat them, where the Mother cannot see thee.' For Mother objected to our eating grapes (except at vintage-time) on the two absurd grounds that grapes 'were not for the likes of us,' and that we always got ill from swallowing the grape-stones.

That was how our life wagged on the Monti Berici. The days were all alike, save for the intrusive tourist. Part of every day, Mariana and I tramped off to the communal school and were genuine Italians. Part of the day we played around the house, or watched for *forestieri* on the Al Cristo platform. It was a constant joy to us to play our little game of surprise with the *forestieri.* We played it quite intentionally, talking Italian together before them for some minutes, till they had committed themselves to a number of frank remarks, and then covering them with confusion by suddenly bursting into an English exclamation. We could never understand why our change of tongue took them so by surprise: but we played upon the peculiarity. To us, it seemed quite natural to be English children in Italy. But the tourists always expressed the same unmitigated astonishment when we revealed our Englishry: and since they generally ended by giving Mariana six sous at least, as some slight solatium for

her wounded feelings, she was fond of exciting me to take part in this amusing game with her.

The only serious drawback to our happiness was Mother.

I can hardly remember when I first began to find out about Mother.

I think it must have been one day in vintage time, about a year after the visit of the artist who sketched me.

We had great fun at vintage. Greater fun even than feeding the silk-worms. All the boys and girls at the communal school had holidays for a week, to help pick grapes and assist in the pressing. Not, of course, all together; each family gathered its own grapes separately, and watched the rows with jealous care lest the children of the next plot should encroach and steal; for there is no identifying stolen grapes once they reach the baskets. As we went to and fro, for some weeks before, indeed, on our way to school, we had to hold our hands clasped above our heads while we passed through the vineyards, that our neighbours might see we were duly keeping them from picking and stealing. To us little ones, however, the vintage, when at last it arrived, was a real festival. We loved passing down through the pergolas, where the purple bunches hung multitudinous overhead, and snipping them off with our scissors, and tossing them with careless glee into the creels. Authorised destructiveness rejoices every one. Besides, we might then eat as many as we liked by the way, even

Mother yielding on that point, having satisfied herself early that 'Childer will be childer; an' shure the o'ny way to reshtrain their appetites is to give free play to them.'

This particular day was a hot one, I admit, even for Italy. Mother from the first had been cross and irritable. She hated heat: 'What would be afther making yer Fader come and pitch his tint in this outlandish counthry, among a barbarious pack of haythen Italians, barrin' their bein' good Cahtholics on Sundays and fistivals, bates ivverything,' she used to say. 'An' thin, the cloimate! Why, in the splindid romantic scaynery of the Kerry mountains, wid their bays and their headlands all contagious to the cool refreshing breeze of the moighty ocean, isn't the cloimate so moild and ayquable that the evergreen arbyootus trees will flourish, the winter t'rough, on the hoights of the precipitous rocky promontories; an' yet in the summer 'tis so cool an' agrayable that ye can sit in the sunshine on the longest day, an' sorra a freckle will the blessed sun of ould Oireland print on the most delicate complexion. Whoile, here, for all they'll talk about their cloudless Italian skies, isn't it frozen in winter ye are, wid nothing to warrum ye barrin' a fayble little scaldeeno, an' burnt up intoirely in summer, wid divvil wan breeze to cool yer brow from the hate of the sayson? Och! 'tis the miserable cloimate I'd be afther calling it at all at all.' And she mopped her face with her apron in pantomimic disapprobation of universal Italy.

All through the day Mariana and I went on pick-

ing our grapes and tossing them into the baskets—except, of course, at siesta time; and all through the day I noticed that as time went on Mother seemed to grow crosser and crosser. As for Father, the crosser she got, and the oftener she called me 'Ye idle little divvil!' the more he seemed to lay his hand on my head and fondle me. 'There, there, my dreamer, my little one,' he whispered to me in Italian, drawing me off towards his basket, away from Mother's; 'come and pick with me. Let the madre have that row; you and I will take this one.' There was something in his touch even more caressing than usual. He seemed to be protecting me from some unknown evil.

I picked with him for a while, laughing and talking and cutting my antic little capers as usual—'That child's soul is in her feet!' my Father used to say of me often—then something perverse drew me back once more towards Mother. I noticed that Mariana stood away from her with caution, and that even when Mother called she took care to keep well out of cuffing distance. I also noticed that from time to time Mother dropped off, for a short time, towards the house and the village, and that after each relaxation her temper became first temporarily better, and then worse again than ever. Now, I have always been a person of a philosophically inquiring temperament; and this unexplained phenomenon roused my curiosity. Investigation is the mainspring of science. I sidled off from Father, who happened to be looking the other way, and went over with my grapes to

Mother's basket. As I put them in, working with childish eagerness, I chanced to give mother a slight accidental push. She pushed back in return to preserve her balance. Between us, somehow, we upset the pannier.

'What for did ye do that, ye clumsy little baste?' my Mother cried, seizing me. Next instant I was aware of a perfect rain of cuffs on my head and ears.

I tried to slip from her grasp with one of my quick, sidelong, snake-like movements. For a second I succeeded. 'It was more your fault than mine,' I cried, facing her, with a fierce sense of burning indignation. 'It was you that upset it. If you hadn't been so awkward——'

She caught at me again, and ran her strong hand through my hair. 'Is it answering me back ye'd be, ye black-hearted little Italian divvil?' she cried, bringing her hand down on my ears. Every nerve in my body tingled with pain as she struck at me savagely.

My Father rushed up in his excitable southern way. 'Drop her!' he shouted aloud in English. 'Drop her, I say! How dare you treat my chaild so? You shall not lay a hand upon her head, ze poor darling!' And he caught me up in his arms and kissed me.

Mother stood off a little and glared at him Her face was distorted. From that day forth I was dimly aware that there was something or other uncanny which I didn't quite understand about Mother.

'Why did you go near her when she was like

that?' Mariana asked me later. Mariana was older and worldly-wiser than I was.

'Like what?' I answered in my innocence.

Mariana paused and pondered, perusing her shoes. She sucked her thumb reflectively. 'Well, didn't you see her eyes were very small?' she suggested at last, in that silvery-liquid voice of hers.

I remembered then that they *did* look small, as indeed I had often observed them before; and I said so, wondering.

Mariana nodded. 'Whenever you see her eyes growing small like that,' she remarked in a tone of candid advice, 'just keep out of her way. You'll find it's better.'

CHAPTER IV

A REVOLTING DAUGHTER

AFTER that, I often noticed that mother had 'small eyes,' as Mariana called it; also that the symptom recurred at shorter and shorter intervals. Mariana and Father talked about it alone at times, as I judged; but they talked so low, and in such enigmatical words, that I could never quite make out what it was they were debating. Childhood is surrounded by these tantalising mysteries. I only knew that Mariana, who was a masterful body, said (stamping her little foot) it *ought* to be put a stop to; and that Father, who was an easy-going man (twirling the ends of his black moustache with irresolute thumb and finger), entirely agreed with her, but shrugged his shoulders and did nothing.

I did something. It was my nature to act. And I acted now. Even as a child, I had a strange congenital habit of decision. 'A strong will,' the man in brown had said; 'but capricious.' It came about at last, I think, through something I read in what I used to call the Talk-Book—the book which told its stories not by means of a direct narrative, but by speeches

which it put into people's mouths, allowing the characters to develop the situations.

I had read a story in this Talk-Book called 'As You Like It.' It was a lovely story, all about the adventures of two young ladies, real *signorine* of the highest rank, who fled forth from their castle into a pathless forest all alone by themselves, and there went in search of the most romantic episodes. I admired those *signorine*. They had such pluck, such initiative! And they hated injustice! So did I. The sense of wrong rankled ever in my bosom. I did not much mind when Father punished me; for he punished justly; or if, in his hot Italian way, he sometimes struck us in sudden temper, he made up for it later on by acknowledging his fault and asking our forgiveness. That touched my heart. But when Mother struck me for no fault committed, I was always angry; and I often thought I should love to set out, like Rosalind and Celia, on a voyage of exploration into the World beyond Vicenza.

That World beyond Vicenza beckoned me from afar with phantom fingers. I looked out on it often at noon or twilight from the Madonna del Monte. The lie of the land spoke to me. The wide grey plain that smouldered in the sunshine; the gleaming white towns that lay sprinkled like bright specks over its misty surface, as daisies lie sprinkled on a close-cropped lawn; the jagged peaks of the Alps, glowing rosy in the sunset from the steps of the great church, all called to me—'Come, come! We are full of romance! We are full of mystery!' From that

coign of vantage my eye beheld the kingdoms of the earth and all their glory.

The lowland plain stretches like a sea. Northward, the Alps form its shore; southward, the Apennines. The Euganean hills—Shelley's Euganeans, though as yet I knew not that there *was* a Shelley—stand up like islands in the middle distance. All is mystic and dim. The eye ranges so far that land melts into cloud, and one sees no horizon.

In the *Thousand and One Nights*, everybody set forth on every page in search of adventures, quite as a matter of course, and embraced the first chance that Allah sent them. I longed to imitate those Sindbads and Aladdins. I was tired of the Monti Berici, and the vines, and the tourists; tired of old Giuseppe and his three-day-old beard, that seemed never older, yet never clean-shaven; tired of the droning sermons preached every Sunday afternoon by the fat-faced priest with the droop in his cheeks to us children at the catechising; tired above all of that rankling sense of injustice suffered at the hands of my Mother. Like Cassim in the cave, I fumed after freedom.

It was written that I should fare forth. But what put the last touch to my romantic longing for romance was an event that occurred when Father went one day to Padua, on the service of the Party.

Before he left the house, he and Mariana held a confidential consultation together. As well as I can guess, I must have been then about twelve years old, and Mariana fourteen; which last, for an Italian girl, may count as about equal to eighteen in England.

I can hear them to this day conspiring in secret under the trellis of vines by the front doorway. The importance of the outcome has fixed the very words they used in my memory.

Mariana said, 'Don't leave her a soldo. Give the money for food to me instead. I can buy bread and meat. Then she will not be able to get it.'

My father shrugged his shoulders and stroked his black moustache ineffectually. After a moment's hesitation, he twitched his sheepskin cloak on one side, as he always did when in doubt or perplexity. He would not for worlds have gone to Padua without that sheepskin cloak. Not only was it the badge of his Party, a protest against the excessive luxury of the black-coated *borghesia*, but it was also his social uniform as a landed proprietor. You could hardly have imagined, if you saw him trudging along a powdery-white Italian road with his high-collared mule and his shaggy sheepskin, that he was the same person as that very grand gentleman who wore an immaculate evening suit, relieved by a false shirt-front and white tie, at Gatti's in London.

'She will get it all the same,' he murmured dubiously. 'The type! the type! 'Tis my experience, Mariana, that when they want it, they manage to get it.'

'That is true,' Mariana answered—and I can hear the very ring of her silvery voice as she uttered with conviction those words, '*È vero!*'—'but, at least, you and I will have cleared our consciences. Is it not always somewhat to have cleared one's conscience?'

My Father pulled the leather purse from his pocket slowly, and counted out some torn and dirty lira notes, one by one, into Mariana's hands. Mariana's little fist closed over them lovingly. She had never held so much money in her grasp before, and I am sure she felt the importance of the position. A gasp of her soft throat and a sparkle in her bright eyes showed her sense of the dignity of the moment. She looked so handsome as she stood there, holding her breath, that I wondered in my heart how the man in brown could ever have said of her, 'Nothing distinctive! Might be Seven Dials!' I had yet to learn that there is beauty and beauty; for Mariana's beauty, though perfect in its kind, was one that you may find by the dozen any day in Italy.

I listened to their talk, and felt like a conspirator. I thought that must be just how Father felt when he sat in conclaves of the Party at Padua, denouncing the *borghesi.*

He turned and laid his gentle bronzed hand on my head. 'You will say nothing of this to her, *piccola mia*?' he asked with an inquiring accent.

The question insulted me! I, a conspirator, and a conspirator's daughter! To betray the secret of the brotherhood to the very authority against whom it was aimed! 'I would die first!' I answered, looking back at him steadfastly. 'Not racks would wring it from me!'

Nobody mentioned my Mother's name throughout. But my Father caught my eye, and saw that I understood. He stooped down and kissed me. There was

always something pathetic about my Father. I burst into tears. I scarce knew myself at the moment why I did so.

But when once he had really gone beyond the dark little ilex-grove, and was winding his way down the hill-path towards Vicenza—a dignified peasant-figure in his crimson sash and loose mantle of sheep-skin—I climbed the housetop, scrambling up it like a monkey, and waved my white headkerchief to him a dozen times over, and cried aloud again and again, 'Good-bye, little father! *Addio, babbino!* Good-bye, good-bye, darling!'

It was one of those prophetic things that one does half-unconsciously, and of which the full meaning only comes to one by the light of what follows.

Father was to be away for four or five days, for the party was agitated by important proposals at Padua. 'Anti-dynastic proposals,' my Papa remarked, dropping his voice, with the preternatural seriousness of the Italian radical; and though I had no notion what manner of wild beast an anti-dynastic proposal might be, I felt sure it was something of the gravest import, like the revolution that drove those fabulous ogres the Austrians out of Italy. So we did not expect to see him back for about a week, during which time I felt sure he would have performed prodigies of valour, and reduced the wicked *borghesi* with his own right hand to much the same condition as Henry V. in the Talk-Book reduced the Frenchmen.

For the first two or three days of his absence,

relations between Mother and Mariana were a trifle strained. No sooner was Father's back turned, indeed, on his way to scatter the hordes of the *borghesia*, than Mother began to perceive the compact we conspirators had entered into. Just at first she turned huffy ; but after the second day or so, while avoiding Mariana's cold gaze, she showed a strange disposition to make up to me. She called me 'Honey' and 'Me darlint' till I began to wonder at what end she could be aiming. Mother was always most affectionate when she wanted something from us. On the third day, after siesta time, she straggled up the arcaded path as far as Al Cristo. She had the shuffling gait of her countrywomen in England. It was early autumn, the season when grapes and love-apples turn colour, and when the annual crop of tourists is expected to ripen at the Madonna del Monte. Already old Giuseppe began to loiter officiously on the chequer-work pavement by the outer steps, rubbing his wrinkled brown hands in pleased anticipation of the coming soldi-harvest.

I was playing alone on the platform just below the cross that bears the effigy of the dead Signore. Mother sidled up to me with an insinuating smile. 'Shure it's two English gintlemen that's advancing up the road,' she muttered in a voice of disguised suggestion.

I looked up and saw them—two middle-aged tourists of the uninteresting sort. Both stout; both perspiring; both taking off their crush hats and mopping their foreheads. Nothing new in all that!

They held in their hands the regulation red books, and looked onward fixedly, like all their tribe, towards the Madonna del Monte.

This kind did not interest me. I went on with the construction of Prospero's island, in which I had just engineered a neat and commodious morass for the reception of Trinculo and his drunken companions. I flooded it by diverting the water from the drain at the roadside. Make-believe was always more to me than reality.

Presently my Mother spoke again, in her blandest accents: 'It's wanting a guide the gintlemen will be, maybe.'

I took no notice once more. If Mother had not been there, of course I should have left Miranda (represented by a forked acacia-twig, with two branches for legs and a rose-hip for head) to perish Ophelia-like in the sodden morass, while I rushed off to follow the strangers round the church. But I didn't quite like the tone in which Mother made the suggestion. It seemed to me to cloak ulterior motives.

'Go up an' spake to them, darlint,' Mother broke out at last, seeing I continued stolidly to manufacture my Ferdinand from a short piece of stick and an unripe grape.

I asserted my ego. 'I don't want to speak to them,' I answered, without taking my eyes from my home-made puppets.

She drew nearer to me. 'Run, quick, there's a jool, an' ask them to give ye half a lira,' she whispered low, pushing me forward. 'If ye bring me half a lira,

ye may ate ivvery grape ye 'll be wanting at all at all this ayvening.'

I looked up at her angrily. The self-respect of the Lupari was offended in my person. I did not mind conducting a tourist to the door of the Rotonda in a friendly way, with a hop, a skip, and a jump; nor did I object to accepting a soldo or two at the end of the visit, if he chose to offer them; but this was a plain hint of deliberate mendicancy. It was what the Moro children did, who lived down the road—they had never been in England, and their father was a shepherd. As Mother said herself, we moved in different circles.

'I am not a beggar,' I answered proudly.

She took my arm in her hand, with a gentle pressure at first, though there was a threat in her touch. 'There now, quick, me darlint, or ye 'll be too late intoirely,' she murmured in my ear. 'Shure, it 's meself, Rosalba, that 's in want of the money.'

'Then why don't you ask for it yourself?' I retorted coldly.

She gazed down on me and smiled. 'An' is it to an ould woman like me they 'd be giving it?' she answered with persuasiveness, though an undercurrent of asperity ran through her coaxing. 'Isn't it the graceful little dancer like yerself that 'll be spiriting the nimble silver out of the pockets of the quality as aisy as asking it? Shure, they couldn't resist ye, me fairy, when ye 'd turn yer big moons of eyes up at them.'

I went on with my play without answering a word.

'Why wouldn't ye be going, bad cess to ye?' she inquired at last, after a long pause.

I continued the arrangement of Ferdinand's arms by running a cross-piece through the middle of his body, and answered, without raising my head, 'Because—I know what you want it for.'

She did not curse me. She did not rush at me and seize me in her grasp, as I expected. She let her hand tighten almost imperceptibly on my arm, and waited without one word till the two perspiring middle-aged tourists had vanished into the church, and were lost to our vision. Then she turned on me in her fury. Never before had she beaten me so fiercely or so mercilessly. She was too angry for words. She did not speak. She only beat and beat till her arms dropped to her side for pure physical weariness.

While she beat me, I cowered and bit my lip. I would not cry. But as soon as she paused for breath, I stooped down, as if I had not even noticed her blows, and picked up Miranda, on whose fragile form she had stamped her foot. 'You have spoilt my dolly!' I exclaimed, holding it up before her.

My forced and pretended nonchalance exasperated her. She fell upon me again. This time I could not help letting the tears break their barrier. 'You would not dare to do it,' I cried out, grinding my teeth, 'if my Father was here!' She cuffed me till I could scarce cry out any longer. Then she let me fall in the sultry white dust of the road, and shuffled angrily homeward.

I lay there long, huddled up in a mass, sobbing

and crouching in my helpless misery. A dog came and sniffed at me. I could not move, I was so sore. My shoulders just quivered convulsively. I lay and let my grievance rankle in my breast. But this was the end: I had made up my mind. I would stand it no longer. I would set forth on the world, like Rosalind and Celia.

My hair lay draggled in the white dust. I sobbed and sobbed till I could sob no more. My strength failed me. It was not the pain that troubled me: it was the ignominy.

Presently old Giuseppe hobbled down from the church, muttering to himself as he went on his way home to his dinner. When he saw me lying there, huddled together on the road like a dead thing, he approached me with caution, and turned me over with his foot, as one might turn a bundle of rags. 'Come, come,' he said. 'It is thou, Rosalba Lupari! Why, what hast thou, my little one? Thy face is crimson; it burns with crying!'

'Mother beat me—because I would not beg,' I answered, aglow with rage and shame, yet blurting out my wrongs like a child. 'I will not beg for her —when my Babbino is at Padua!'

He raised me, and held me off by one arm as one might hold a wounded puppy. 'She has hurt thee,' he said at last, scanning my bruised face and ears. 'She is *cattiva*, that Englishwoman!'

'She *isn't* English!' I cried, eager even in my pain for the honour of my native country. 'She is an Irishwoman!'

'And yet, she is a Christian!' old Giuseppe murmured, stroking his three-day-old beard. 'A Catholic like ourselves, too, not one of these mad heretic *Inglesi*. And she beats you like a dog! Come home with me, my child, and have some supper!'

He led me by the hand to his cottage on the slope, and gave me polenta, and salami, and a little thin red wine. The polenta and the sausage I ate greedily, for I was hungry; but the wine I put away. 'No, never any more,' I said solemnly, child as I was; 'I will not taste it. That makes beasts of men and women. I hate it! I hate it!'

'The child is a strange creature!' old Giuseppe murmured to his niece, who kept house for him. 'She has the evil eye, Adela. Look at her thick black eyebrows and her black lashes, long like a cat's! 'Tis fairy spawn. But her mother treats her ill. Let her eat and rest here!'

I stopped there till evening. Then Mariana, sucking her thumb as was her wont, came on an embassy to fetch me.

'If I go home will she beat me again?' I asked the ambassador.

'No,' Mariana answered defiantly. 'How can she? She dare not! She is afraid of *me*. I will not let her lower the honour of the Lupari. This is the last time. I will tell all to Father.'

It *was* the last time, I felt sure. That thought consoled me. I limped home, carrying with me ostentatiously Miranda and Ferdinand, whom I had upholstered afresh with great care and many new

decorations, including some tags of coloured wool picked up from Adela's workbox: and when I entered our kitchen, I pretended to be altogether absorbed in playing with them, never casting an eye in my Mother's direction. Her glance was fixed upon me, but she said nothing. I sat there till bed-time, arranging Miranda's skirt from a blue rag Mariana had found for me. Then I rose abruptly and stole off to bed. Mariana stole after me with an approving smile. 'You are of the Lupari,' she whispered at my ear. 'Never yield, Rosalba!'

I have never yielded.

CHAPTER V

THE WIDE WORLD

I COVERED my head with the bedclothes and sobbed myself to sleep. Reality merged into dreamland. But before I slept, I had made up my mind. God gave me the great gift of discontent. I was born a revolutionist in the grain, like my Father. In the little State called *home* I saw no way of successfully resisting constituted authority by constitutional means. You cannot lead a Parliamentary Opposition against your Mother. My one resource lay in open rebellion. I must publish my Declaration of Independence. Before sunrise to-morrow I would go forth on the world, in defiance of all law, to seek adventures like Rosalind and Celia.

Law is injustice, backed up by force. Freedom is lawlessness. Read there my simple creed. You may take it or leave it.

Very early in the morning I woke from a sound sleep. The rooks cawed. That caw was a bugle-call. I woke with a start, half-crying. Then everything came back to me: I recalled the courage expected from one of the house of the Lupari. (We had high ideals of the honour of the family. Such

legends are always false—and always useful.) I rose and dressed myself very noiselessly indeed. Mariana opened her eyes under the long black lashes, and stared at me with a sleepy stare, but said nothing. I think she knew what I meant, and approved my plan, but scrupled to commit herself to active connivance. Dear Mariana's rôle in life is diplomatic prudence. I crept downstairs on tiptoe, lifted the latch of the door, and walked out. Nobody else was up. I had the Monti Berici to myself. The silence assailed me. It was a bright clear morning, though the sun was unrisen; the pale sky reddened in the direction of Padua.

I took a huge hunk of bread and a piece of salt fish, and stepped lightly forth on my voyage of exploration. The fiend at my elbow tempted me. '*Via!*' says the fiend, as he spake to Lancelot Gobbo in the Talk-Book. '*Via!*' says the fiend. 'Away!' says the fiend, ''fore the heavens!'

I was not at all sad, in spite of the great hush, the vast blank of silence. On the contrary, I remember, as soon as I got free of our cottage, such a sense of joy and liberty thrilled me that I began to peal out 'Lodate Maria' from sheer delight at recovered freedom. The world was all before me where to choose. I was bound for Bagdad or the Forest of Arden.

Which did not matter. In all rational geographies they lie all round us.

I knew not what strange joys might yet be in store for me in those far, near realms: what dervishes

might waft me on enchanted carpets ; what Orlandos might take pity on my forlorn condition.

Nevertheless, I was wise in my generation. I did not go down to Vicenza. People were abroad there in the streets all night; and I knew that Mother's first idea when she found I had flown would be to follow me into the town and make inquiries. Besides, Vicenza was familiar—that is to say, commonplace. I courted the Unknown. So I mounted instead towards the Madonna del Monte; offered a little prayer to Our Dear Lady as I passed, that she might direct me aright to some fortunate issue ; and then descended the hill past the Seven Winds' House—the Casa dei Sette Venti—so as to strike the main road from Vicenza to Verona beyond the Campo Marzio.

Verona was the town where Juliet loved and died. I peopled it still with Montagues and Capulets.

Beyond the Sette Venti the road was strange to me and very lonely. A long white vista between poplars that narrowed and met, it ended nowhere. Tall black cypresses pointed heavenward their forbidding fingers. Dragons guarded the way : unseen magicians lined it. I began to be afraid and felt half-minded to turn back, lest basilisks should block my path. Dante's harpies affrighted me. Then I remembered in good time that I was my Father's daughter. Was it not my Papa who, almost single-handed, drove a hundred thousand armed Austrians before him, and waded in their hateful Tedesco blood till he expelled the last of the craven wretches

from the soil of Italy? Courage, Rosalba! Let not cockatrices alarm you! Go on, go on, nor ever halt nor falter till fair fortune find you in the market-place of Verona!

I trudged alone along the road in the grey of early dawn. The red flush faded from the Paduan sky. A rim of sun rose silent over the edge of the Monti Berici. I plodded on and on, meeting scarce a soul, though now blue wreaths of smoke began to roll slowly from isolated farmhouses, and men to creep out into the misty fields, among the maize and the vineyards. My dragons retreated as the men came forth; my basilisks hid themselves; the only magicians left were kindly Prosperos. My spirits rose again. Ay, now I was in Arden.

I had plodded a long way, with the Monti Berici always on my left, and the trenchant skyline of the Alps on my right, when I saw on a hilltop towards the great mountains a ruined castle. It loomed against the sky strange and romantic—just such a castle, massive and battlemented, with huge red towers, the exiled Duke must have quitted when he went forth into the woods at the cruel behest of his unnatural brother. Not distant from it rose another and far newer *château*, a fantastic modern building of much gaudy magnificence, walled in with gardens of myrtle and bay, and terraced with balustrades, where I could fancy that Rosalind and Celia even now disported themselves at the usurper's court. I went to visit both long after from our home at Vicenza, and recalled them perfectly. The exiled Duke's em-

battled ruin turned out to be the mediæval castle of Montecchio—the home, strange to say, of those very 'Montagues' whom Shakespeare had immortalised; the flimsy modern *château* was the Montebello Vicentino, the domain of Count Arrighi. But I knew nothing then either of Shakespeare or of the Arrighi. The Talk-Book was to me as authorless a document as the *Arabian Nights*, while Roméo and Juliet were historic denizens of that very Verona towards whose domes and towers my weary feet were plodding.

Men passed me now with waggons and teams of cream-coloured oxen—big, patient, large-eyed, slow-paced oxen, toiling on resignedly. The day grew hot. The sun beat on me.

Yet I was immensely happy, though happy, I will admit, with a fearsome joy—the tumultuous throbbing joy of first-tasted freedom. The eloquent silence spoke to me. Gnomes peeped from caverns in the limestone cliffs. Puck danced on the thistledown. I had finished my crust of bread and my chunk of salt fish, which last had made me intolerably thirsty. At a roadside fountain, where Melusina lurked, I scooped up water with my curved hands and drank. The jet spurted from a broken-nosed dolphin in a shell-shaped niche. Then I sat down with my back against the peeling trunk of a southern plane, and began to sing, out of pure glee in my liberty.

The song I sang was an English one—I have forgotten now what. But I sang it with a will, very loud and merrily.

As I sat and sang, taking no heed for the morrow, a man and a woman approached. I looked up and beheld—the One-eyed Calender!

That he *was* the One-eyed Calender I never doubted for a moment. What a Calender's precise function in life may be I had not and have not the faintest conception. I do not desire to know. On John Stodmarsh's library shelf in Avenue Road, St. John's Wood, there stood, and no doubt still stands, in a conspicuous position the volume of Dr. Murray's great English Dictionary which contains the words from *Cabin* to *Castaway*. I looked at its cover often, and reflected that there (if I chose to open it) I could learn the whole truth, the cold, scientific, etymological truth, about the origin and meaning of the word Calender. But I preferred, as I still prefer, my ignorance. Let us leave *some* illusions. A Calender to me is someone, vague, mysterious, oriental, wonderful. He dresses, most likely, in white samite, and lives upon dainties culled from silken Samarcand and cedared Lebanon. I do not wish to be told that he merely makes tape, or shoes horses, or sells false jewellery, or manufactures steel pens for the use of the India Office. I hold a Calender to be essentially a man with one eye, whose duties and prerogatives are altogether evasive.

This man had one eye. So I *knew* he was the Calender.

Otherwise, he chiefly resembled a scarecrow. He was a shambling person, with clothes that held together by the grace of God rather than by the common laws of cohesion.

He regarded me with amazement. 'Listen!' he said to his wife—at least, I saw no reason to doubt the sallow lady's relationship. 'What language is that that the wild thing is singing?'

'It is English,' I answered. 'A song of the *Inglesi*!' I had not yet been taught that 'tis unladylike to converse in the streets with strangers. That knowledge I owed later to Her Imperturbability Miss Westmacott.

'How didst thou learn it, little witch?' he asked.

'How did you learn I was a witch?' I retorted.

'Nay, but tell me.'

'In London,' I answered, in my 'of course' tone of voice. For to me it was so natural that an English-born child should have the gift of English.

'*A Londra?*' the woman echoed, with a little start. 'Thou 'st been there?'

'But yes,' I answered, laughing. 'What wouldst have? I was born there.'

The woman looked at the man. The man looked at the woman. They exchanged a quick-darted glance of question and answer. Then the One-eyed Calender asked in a tone of candid inquiry, 'What is the English for *pane*?'

'*Bread*,' I replied, much amused. 'I wish I had some!'

The woman looked at the man. Her face was tied up in a handkerchief for toothache. The man nodded and said, 'It is true. *Bread!* And for *vino*?'

'*Wine*,' I answered, wondering not a little why they should thus catechise me.

The pair spoke to one another low for a minute. Then the woman, who possessed the relics of a pug-nose, pulled out a slice of *panettone*, a sort of common cake—big sultanas scattered sparsely like islands through a sea of dough—and handed it across to me. She pulled it from a bundle which was far from clean; I cannot imagine nowadays how I ate it. But I was young, and I was hungry: two powerful incentives. I fell to it yarely, and ate every morsel; I even recollect that I thought it delicious. Indeed, I have a fancy for *panettoni* to this day, and always buy a couple when we drop down to Vicenza from our vineyard on the hills: you can get them most excellently confectioned at a pastry-cook's shop in the Piazza delle Biade.

The sallow woman glanced at my feet. They were naturally dusty. If you could see that road! 'Thou hast come far this morning,' she murmured.

I admitted the fact. 'I rose early,' I explained.

'Whence dost come?'

The spontaneous Italian expedient of a lie at once occurred to me. 'From Schio,' I answered mendaciously. (Remember, all this antedated Miss Westmacott, at whose excellent Select School for Young Ladies I learned better morals and better manners.)

She shook her unkempt head. 'No, no; 'tis too far! Vicenza at utmost.'

'Oh, if you doubt me——' I cried; then I remembered that I was lying. Virtuous indignation sits ill on the detected.

'Vicenza?' she repeated, with an interrogative accent, scanning my face to see if her guess was right.

I surrendered at discretion and ate my lie. '*Si, si*; Vicenza!'

'Then why didst thou seek to deceive me?'

I was on adventures bound, and the One-eyed Calender had the air of an adventurer. In the background stood, in point of fact, his symbol and means of livelihood, a scissors-grinder's wheel. What life more venturesome than the free life of the road? I risked my all on one bold cast. 'I am running away from home,' I answered, shaming the devil. He fled, discomfited.

The woman's keen eyes gazed at my welted neck and arms. 'Father?' she asked at last, with a comprehending air.

I drew back as if stung. 'Father?' I cried in horror. 'Oh, no; he is so good. Not him, but Mother.'

Their glance met again, darting rapid signals. 'Speak English well?' the woman asked in our elliptical Italian fashion.

'All as well as Italian.'

'Say in English, "This lady and gentleman are my Father and Mother."'

I said it unhesitatingly.

'Speak more.'

I burst out into the passionate recital of my wrongs, and my reasons for leaving home. It was a relief to me to unburden. I knew they did not understand one word I spoke; but that was all the

better. I would have been too proud to let them know if they comprehended what I said; but the mere outpouring of my heart in speech acted like an outlet to my pent-up indignation. I opened the flood-gates. I waxed eloquent, in English.

'She will do,' the woman said shortly. 'Little witch, wouldst like to come with us?'

'Why do you call me little witch?' I asked, hanging back.

'Because of thy big saucer eyes and thy long black eyelashes. Thou wilt tell fortunes in time. Thou'st the air of a sorceress. It is a merry life on the road, and I can see thou art one that loves well freedom. We sleep where we can; we eat what we earn; we go where we choose; and we pay no sou of rent or tax to any one!'

'*Sta bene*,' I answered. 'I ask no more. I came forth to-day in search of adventures. But, behold'—I drew myself up and bared my bruised arm. 'I have run away from home because of these stripes. Treat me well, and I stop with you, no matter where you go; but beat me'—I paused, then I drew my hand threateningly across my bare brown throat. 'And *you* will answer for it!'

'*Is* she a witch?' the man cried, laughing. 'I ask you but that, *is* she a witch? In time the child ought to be worth any money.'

The woman murmured something deprecating in a tongue I did not know. Only long after did I see some in print, and learn that it was the ancient tinkers' language. But I understood, all the same:

she was warning him not to give me too good a conceit of myself.

Still the man was not yet satisfied. He sampled me all over as if I were a dog for sale. Then 'Run!' he cried, clapping his hands.

I ran.

'Run till I say *turn*!' he continued.

I ran on, and back again when he bid me.

He listened at my chest and felt my arms when I got back to him, running my hardest. Apparently he judged me sound in wind and limb, for he smiled as he finished.

Though unprepossessing in appearance, he had not an unkindly voice or manner. 'Look here, little one,' he said, twitching his face in a queer way that was habitual with him, 'we are going to England, and we have need of an interpreter. England is a very great and rich country, where all the people have much money, and where everything is most beautiful.' (That was scarcely my recollection of Leather Lane; but I held my peace, not feeling myself called on for criticism.) 'If thou wilt come with us and interpret for us, we will promise not to beat thee. We are not rich; we are *poverini*, we others, as thou seest; but we will share everything with thee, as with our own daughter. We will be thy Father and Mother. Come; is it a bargain?'

'It is a bargain,' I answered; 'faith of the Lupari!'

At that they both laughed, though I meant it as a solemn form of adjuration. Their laugh grated. I

saw my new allies did not take my family and the moral law as seriously as I did.

But I was free—that was well. I am an amateur of freedom. All the troubles that have come upon me through life have come through my resolute determination to be myself at all hazards. Yet I would incur them again rather than prove false to my own nature. Better the frosty dews under a convenient hedge than to have one's thoughts and beliefs and habits dictated to one.

'Budge!' said the fiend. 'Budge not!' said my conscience. 'Fiend!' said I, 'you counsel well. My heels are at your commandment.'

CHAPTER VI

THE LOG OF A LAND CRUISE

IF you are a stupid person, who want to be amused, take my advice and skip this chapter.

We slept that night at San Bonifacio, in a fifth-rate inn; next day we proceeded on our way to Verona.

O siren Verona! what shall I say of thee? I have seen thee often since, dear siren, ever beautiful, ever picturesque, ever the most Italian sight in Italy! But that whirling first glimpse, in that strange weird company—how effective it was, how Veronese, how appropriate! We arrived, not prosaically by rail, but straggling footsore over the Roman bridge that crosses the Adige. It chanced to be market-day; and we went straight through the narrow paved streets into the arcaded Piazza delle Erbe, alive with booths, and crowded with market-women under their red umbrellas. Huge ribbed and wrinkled melons smiled temptingly on the stalls; purple aubergines hung in shining bunches from the sides of the carts; yellow pumpkins lay huddled in careless heaps on the ground; all was noise and bustle and colour and plenty. As for apples and oranges,

they glutted the market. The One-eyed Calender bought a pink-fleshed water-melon as big as a horse's head; I eyed it thirstily. He cut a juicy slice out of its middle with his pocket-knife (first cleaning the edge in his mouth), and gave it me to eat as I stood and gazed up at the columns and statues of the crumbling Piazza. The World beyond Vicenza—oh, the World beyond Vicenza was beautiful and wonderful! Not in wildest dreams of Bagdad or Cairo had I pictured aught lovelier, aught more romantic than Verona!

To see that siren first with a child's eyes—round eyes of wonder; well—Madonna del Monte, thou hadst been truly kind to me!

I looked for the balcony where Juliet leaned out to speak with Roméo, and I soon found it. In point of fact, I found it ten deep in every mouldering street. All poetry might come true any day in Verona. What tragedies hid themselves behind those round-arched *loggie*! What eyes peered down from those mysterious *persiennes*!

Alas, however, this planet is ruled by Supply and Demand, not by poetry! The demand for scissors-sharpeners was slack in Verona. By the end of three days we had ground and set every rickety pair from the Porta Vescovo to San Zeno Maggiore, and were outward bound once more by dusty roads on our long slow journey northward and westward.

I acquit the One-eyed Calender of deliberate divagation. It was his honest intention to proceed by the directest route he knew to England. But the

directest route in his case was not the St. Gotthard. Motion, I now know (thanks to Miss Westmacott), follows the line of least resistance. To a scissors-grinder, the line of least resistance is the path which leads him past the largest number of poor scissors-owning populations. Poor, I say, for the reckless rich throw away old scissors, instead of grinding them. Placards on the walls by Verona railway-station informed us (in flaring red and green) that London could be reached direct in thirty-six hours. That was not *our* experience. We took fourteen months to straggle deviously as far as Paris, with frequent stoppages by the way for rest and refreshment.

If the One-eyed Calender had refreshed less frequently, indeed, 'tis probable we might have journeyed faster; for we were all three good walkers, and the roads were straight with continental straightness. Their parallel lines of poplars converged and met somewhere about infinity. But my new master had a shuffling sidelong gait, much like a hermit-crab's: I attributed it in part to the long effects of that constant uncertainty which has its origin in wine. It was his habit, indeed, to spend in drink the larger part of his gains, whenever he made any. I cannot call him a turbulent or a savage drunkard; what he had promised me was true; he never beat me. But he used to sit down at wayside inns and drink, drink, drink, in a solemn, serious, sober spirit, like one who knew few other pleasures, and who was conscientiously determined to make the most

of this one. He drank earnestly. He was a philosopher in his way, and his philosophy was Omarian.

'The rich, look thou, Rosalba,' he used to say to me; 'the rich have many enjoyments. The poor have one. I do not blame the aristos that they frequent the races, the theatre, the circus, the promenade; I would do as much myself, were I an aristo. I do not blame them that they have singers and dancers and players to amuse them. Singing, dancing, and playing are well if you can afford them. But the poor man has only one club, the osteria, only one pleasure, to get drunk when possible. Then he should do it always. Life is not so rich in enjoyments that he can afford to miss the best it gives him. When they make me a marchese, I will mend my ways; while I remain a scissors-grinder, I shall practise such life as seems gayest for my profession.'

Within the first few days of our companionship, however, the Calender began to learn that I would not taste wine; and being the wreck of a Mephistopheles, he loved to tempt me. I have as few prejudices, I flatter myself, as most Italians; and certainly I was at no time a bigoted teetotaller; but since that day on the Monti Berici, I had made up my mind never to taste again the moral poison. I believed it begot habits of injustice. Later in life (I write calmly of my past from the specular mount of seven-and-twenty) my objection was based on the definite idea that in a family where the demon of drink had once entered, one should meet his first

blandishments with a stern 'Get thee behind me, Satan!' But in this earlier stage, when I had not so much as heard that modern Mesopotamia, the blessed word *heredity*, I knew only that I did not wish to resemble my Mother. Do not fancy me a preacher; I know what I am saying; and if you doubt my breadth of mind, I will join you forthwith in a bottle of champagne, just to show you at once that I am not bigoted.

But the One-eyed Calender, as I say, loved to attack my resolve. He would pour out a glass of our small red wine—very, very small—and would hold it up to the light to show me how it danced. Then he would murmur insinuatingly, with a gleam of white teeth—age never darkened them—'Good! Ah, so good! Just one little sip, *piccola*! That will put fresh legs into thy threadbare stockings when thou art tired with walking!'

I shook my head, capered about a bit in pantomimic refusal, and answered 'No, no.' The Calender's wife upheld me in my decision. Middle-aged women are always virtuous—for their charges. Besides, she saw no reason why good red wine should be wasted on imps who did not want it.

Our wanderings were long and slow. They were also tedious. We had no Circassian slaves, no enchanted carpets. Yet I thank God that He taught me betimes the stern lesson of indigence. We marched first by road, with our kits on our backs, past the Lago di Garda; then on by Brescia and Treviglio through the boundless plain to Milan.

That was the grandest place I had ever seen in my life—Milan! I thought it then, and indeed think it now, a vast deal handsomer and nobler than London. It may be childish memory; it may be personal taste; but I know no town that impresses me still so much with its magnificence. I adhere to this day to my qualifying adjective. My countrymen call it 'Milano la grande!' and they are right. Milan is grand; Paris is only grandiose. But alas, the knife-grinding trade languished in Milan! 'Twas ever thus. When we arrived at a town where I should have loved to tarry—a town full of bright shops and splendidly robed ladies — the One-eyed Calender grumbled perpetually that business was slack; while the Signora his wife, who arranged for our installation, complained that the price of a night's lodging was exorbitant. But when we passed through squalid brown-tiled villages, where we slept in open maize-barns or under the windy shelter of hayricks, the One-eyed Calender's remaining eye lit up with pleasure; there, trade simply boomed, soldi rained upon us, red wine ruled cheap, and the village fathers, conspicuously free from aristocratic exclusiveness, sat and gossiped with us late on sanded floors as to how affairs marched in Milan and the Provinces. At such spots, we were hailed as in the thick of the Movement.

It was a wild free life; in its way, I will honestly confess, I loved it.

A gipsy-like strain runs through my blood even to-day. I decline to be a mollusk. For two pins, I could give up my comfortable home in Aunt Emily's

vineyards on the Monti Berici, and wander the world once more, as with the One-eyed Calender.

From Milan our trail grew more and more devious. Being ultimately bound for England, of course we turned our faces southward toward Genoa. We marched in Indian file. The Calender led the company: the Signora followed at a varying distance: I brought up the rear, especially towards evening. A few days of such straggling march through the Lombard level saw us at the foot of some high green hills, which the One-eyed Calender knew as the Apennines. He was no geographer; he could not use a map; but he had the born wayfarer's instinct for routes; and when I follow our track now on the best atlases, I cannot see that he ever took a wrong turn—allowing of course for the necessary divagations of the scissors-grinding industry. The object of people in our line of business was not to find the shortest road from spot to spot, with monotonous accuracy, but to select the track that would lead past the greatest number of scissors-using villages, without ever exposing one for any length of time to the chance of traversing unpopulated or, what was worse, scissors-barren country.

I remember well that green tramp over the Apennines:—the long steep rise; the bivouacs by the side of churning torrents; the wind that displayed the Signora's meagre anatomy through her clinging rags; the compassionate bread-offerings of brown-skinned peasant women who took pity on me, shivering, for a footsore *poverina*: the halt on the

bare summit; the glorious descent upon basking Genoa, ringed round with tiers of hills like the seats in a circus. Can I forget the hungry mood in which we wound our way down the endless slopes of that interminable zigzag? There is no plan to realise the size of a country like plodding across it on foot. By so doing, you measure yourself against it. I have a just conception of the true bigness of France and Italy, which wholly fails me when I try to picture the relative extent of California or Texas.

I may as well finish this dull description of our route at once, now that I am about it. Were my purpose merely to write an agreeable story, I might curtail the whole, or suggest it for you instead by a few graphic anecdotes and vivid dramatic scenes of particular adventures. But I am too stern a realist. Every novel worth the name is autobiographic, a transcript from life—one's own reminiscences, aptly selected and artistically presented. That alone carries conviction. My desire is therefore to picture my adventures to you as faithfully as I may: and I cannot put you at my point of view without insisting a little on this mere skeleton framework of aimless wanderings. From Genoa we marched slowly, up and down hill, one slope after another, like a switch-back railway, along a narrow strip of coast between the mountains and the sea, which, as I now know, English people call the Riviera. Silvery-shuddering olives clung to the slopes; Judas-trees flamed on the rocky headlands. It was a monotonously beautiful tramp—day after day we started at dawn from some

white village in a hot river valley (where we had just ground all the scissors the inhabitants possessed), mounted a steep hill with wide map-like views over the blue water, crossed a panoramic ridge, and descended on the other side, weary and thirsty, at the ringing of the Angelus, to a similar white village, with a whitewashed church, and a fresh crop of scissors, which struck monotonous sparks from the monotonous wheel with a monotonous drone that grew positively odious to me. I hated everything but the hills and the sea, the silver of the olives and the gold of the orange-groves. Those grew daily dearer. They kept alive within me the poetic instinct.

At last, hemmed in between the mountains and the shore, we began to reach a long line of splendid meretricious towns : towns whose like I had not seen before—courtesans of the great—San Remo, Mentone, Nice, Cannes, Monte Carlo. There, scissors flagged. The poor have no part in them. We hurried past them all, gleaming white in the sun, and smiling with their rows of villas towards the sea ; we made for Marseilles and up the Rhône valley in the direction of Paris. We jogged on, deliquescent, through the arid fields, with the thermometer at ninety in the shade —if there had been any. I cannot rattle down the Rhône valley now in the *train de luxe*, past those grim grey towns, without a sigh and a smile for the far-off time when we toiled up it slowly, ten kilomètres a day, along sun-baked roads, half-barefoot and half-clad, in draggled procession—the One-eyed

Calender in front, singing and wagging his head—he had St. Vitus's dance—and trundling his wheel before him: the Signora his wife slouching behind, with a bone in both hands, in her anxiety to extract from it the last particle of nourishment: and myself trailing after, a little on one side, in the narrow shadow of the walls, watching the lizards dart into sheltered holes as I approached, and envying them the cool crannies where I could not follow them.

All this time I was learning, learning, learning. People have often expressed surprise to me since that, with 'my early disadvantages,' I should yet be able to hold my own in society. To me, the wonder seems all the other way: how do our women come to know anything when they have never had points of contact with realities?

No schooling was allowed to interfere with my education. I was getting a clear idea of European geography, and a distinct conception of the value of centesimi. I was also, imperceptibly to myself, adding to my little stock of languages. Before we reached Paris, I spoke Provençal and French as well as I already spoke English and Italian. Not that I even knew I was learning them. That is the best of being bilingual: given two tongues, all others come easily. Moving slowly as we did along the debatable borderland of the languages, through Genoa and the Ligurian coast to Provence, and then up the Rhône valley, I hardly even noticed at the time the demarcation of dialects. They melt into one another imperceptibly. It seemed to me only that, as I trailed

ever westward and northward, the people spoke progressively worse and worse Italian. What was oddest of all, when we first entered France it was the common people who spoke best, and the *signori* who used the most clipped and distorted dialect. Only gradually did I learn, as we neared Lyons and Dijon, that this extremely bad and mispronounced Italian was what people call French, and that the better the French the curter and more maimed and debased the words in it. Something of that feeling persists with me to this day; though I now speak French with ease, and immensely admire the grace of French literature, the language itself sounds to me always like bastard Italian. John Stodmarsh tells me that is because it is the furthest removed of all Romance tongues from the original Latin. He says I was really a philologist *sans le savoir.*

Philologist or not, thus it came about that I grew into a linguist. For this, I think there were ample reasons. If one starts with Italian and English, French is hardly more than a half-way house, having relations with both. But more than that; those who do not love me will tell you that I am in type an adventuress. Now it is a common note of adventuresses that, clever or stupid, they invariably possess the gift of tongues—without which, indeed, you are not an adventuress at all, but a mere ordinary dishonest body. Adventuresses are the intellectual aristocracy of crime. I have learnt with ease every European language I have come across, except German. For the exception I have good grounds;

indeed, I do not know why any un-Teutonic soul should ever wish to acquire the tongue of the Fatherland. In the first place, it spoils the expression of your mouth; in the second place, it can only be of use to you in the improbable event of your desiring to hold conversation with a German.

The Duddleswells and others have carelessly asserted that during this long march we often slept out in the rain. That is a vile calumny. In hopelessly wet weather, the One-eyed Calender always sought the shelter of a tramp's refuge, or took us to one of those humble *auberges* on the outskirts of villages, where '*On loge à pied*' is scrawled on the lintel in uneven letters. It was only on fine nights that we ever slept in the open; even then we usually lay under some barn or shed, or else nestled close beneath the big stones that supported a hayrick.

And my Father, all this time?—Ah, there you put your finger on a spot that winces!

Remember, I was a child. A child's head has room for but one emotion at a time. That emotion, while it lasts, monopolises consciousness. On the day when I left home, my head was filled with burning indignation against my Mother. I am not ashamed to say that, just at that moment, I forgot my Father. Such forgetfulness is my only excuse—that, and my age; for used not Miss Westmacott to inform me with impressive iteration that you cannot put old heads on young shoulders? I never thought

of my Father's distress and alarm till I reached Milan, and could no longer see the Monti Berici. By that time, return was practically impossible. But the moment it occurred to me, I cried hard over it.

'Why dost thou cry?' the Signora asked.

I told her.

She agreed with me that to go back was out of the question. She and the One-eyed Calender were certainly not going back to please me; and I could not tramp alone from Milan to Vicenza. Why not, as easily as I had run away from home, you ask? There, dear respectable English reader, you show once more the limitations of your respectability. Had you had the mental advantage of being a tramp, as I have had it, you would see *why* at once. It is easy to set out from home and go where fortune leads you; she is certain in the end to lead you somewhere. But to set out with the object of attaining a definite point is quite another matter; the jade, in that case, will surely guide your steps to Patagonia when you are bound for Kamtschatka. 'Tis Theseus in the labyrinth, without his clue. We all know the difference between trying to draw a card at random and trying to draw four aces running.

When I came to realise what I had done, I cried much about my Father; and the very first money I earned for myself—you shall hear of that presently—I spent on a sheet of paper and a stamp to write to him. I learned long after from Mariana that he received my letter, and how much it comforted

him. And he forgave me, I know; for when I returned to the Monti Berici, I planted a white rose-bush on my Father's grave; and that white rose-bush blossomed far more luxuriantly than Mariana's myrtle. But this is anticipating; and you are not to suppose my dear Father dead until I tell of it.

CHAPTER VII

I FIND MY VOCATION

YOU must not imagine, however, that all this time I was dependent for bread on the charity of the One-eyed Calender and the Signora his wife. Quite the contrary: reciprocity is the soul of business. I was at least as useful to my new friends as they to me; otherwise, being of those who will not beg, I should not have continued to journey in their company.

When the wandering Calender dropped from the sky and invited me to join his travelling band of two, he did it, I was aware (in the most literal sense) with a single eye to his own advantage. With the wisdom of this age, he saw that 'there was money in me.' But being a prudent man in his own line, he did not at once press his advantage; he regarded me from the first as a long investment, and waited for my talents to develop naturally. They did develop before long; indeed, I think he saw a return for his money—or rather his bread and protection—sooner than he expected.

It is my temperament to dance. Some elf dwells in my limbs; he moves as to a tabor. And he danced me on my way from Vicenza to Paris, when

I was not engaged in straggling at the rear of our travelling company.

The dancing took shape of itself. I think it was as we trudged from Milan to Genoa that I first discovered the trade value of my antics. We had stopped at Borghetto, a small white village lost among the folds of the Apennines, where we camped on the open piazza near the church. The population, as usual, turned out in force with all its scissors. Our advent marked an epoch. While the women and children stood by to watch the shower of sparks, I played about by myself in the dust of the piazza, making dolls, as was my fashion, out of sticks and rags which I picked up in the gutter. One of the dolls I named, as usual, Roméo, the other Juliet. In pure childish spirits I began playing them off against one another, talking and gambolling as I did so. Presently, one or two of the elder children, tired of the sparks that flew from the wheel, turned round to listen. They made up my first audience. Encouraged by their interest, I began my game all over again, out of a girl's mere vanity at finding somebody pay attention to her chatter; I told them the story of Romeo e Giulietta, half in recitative, half in pantomime and action. Sometimes I narrated; sometimes I danced and capered; sometimes I used my puppets as marionettes, and spoke for them like a Punch-and-Judy man, just as the fancy seized me. By and by, I became aware that the elders too had formed a ring around me, and that all Borghetto was straining its ears to hear me. Even the One-

eyed Calender left off his grind, grind, grind, and leaned on the frame of his wheel to listen; the Signora bent forward and craned her skinny neck; not a woman in the crowd but overflowed with sympathy for 'that poor Giulietta,' and eagerly awaited the unfolding of her story.

The more I found my audience listened, the more eager and excited I became. I poured forth my tale as far as I could remember it, with dramatic accompaniment; I made my *fantoccini* talk and cry; I danced sympathetically in a *ballet d'action*. The women cried out that Giulietta was a sweet *fanciulla*, and that I was a little witch; both which candid expressions of opinion delighted me. My first performance was an immense success, all the more because wholly improvised and unrehearsed. In that moment I became aware that I was at heart an artist.

As soon as I had finished, and fell back, laughing, showing my teeth with pride, the One-eyed Calender rose at once from his wheel and improved the occasion. Wagging his head grimly, he handed me the little tin mug (embossed with the legend *Bevi, cara*), out of which we drank the water of brooks on our way, and motioned me to go round with it. I did not hesitate. *That* was not begging. I felt at once it was in essence payment for an artistic exhibition.

I carried the mug round, casting a saucy triumphant eye as I went on my queer little audience. The village was poor, but its sympathies were awakened. Hands fumbled in pockets. Old purses

opened. Centesimi poured in with surprising rapidity. When I had tripped round the circle, casting a smile and a nod at each prospective giver, or dropping a quick curtsey to accompany each 'grazie,' as the coppers jingled on the floor of the tin mug, we counted out our gains and found I had netted thirteen soldi. For the Calender and his wife thirteen soldi clear was a glittering Golconda. The patron's one eye glistened. 'I told you she would go far!' he murmured to his wife in a tone of triumph.

The Signora, who was an acidulous lady, made a wry face (as though her own were not wry enough), and muttered something in the unknown tongue which she always talked when she did not wish me to understand. But though the words were strange to me and conveyed no meaning, I was quite old enough to catch at the intonation: she was telling the One-eyed Calender not to say too much and make the girl overproud of her performance. Indeed, the Signora's desire to avoid excessive praise had often a deeper effect upon me than her husband's frank recognition of my worth. I saw in her lack-lustre eye that she was afraid I might form too good an opinion of my own value and so slip through her fingers; the knowledge that she thus desired to keep me gave me an effectual lever to use against her in case of injustice. For it was injustice that I dreaded; not for naught was I born the daughter of the man who with his own right hand drove the Austrians out of Italy, and who was even

then engaged in plotting to upset the new despotism of the tyrannical *borghesia.*

My audience lingered about a little when all was over, to see whether perchance I would repeat my performance; but the Signora whispered to me, 'No more to-night, lest you make yourself cheap, little one!'

I recognised her wisdom and shook my head waywardly.

The audience murmured discontent; so, by way of protest, I proceeded to put my puppets to bed with profound seriousness. 'Poor Roméo!' I said, bending over him, 'he is dead. We must bury him quietly. These good people of Borghetto will not allow even the dead to sleep in peace! They want me to play the archangel Gabriel—toot, toot, toot, on a tin trumpet—and bring him to life again with a glorious resurrection. But no, my poor Roméo; I know how you feel. You need rest to-night after so much emotion!'

The women laughed and nodded their heads. 'Is she clever,' they cried, 'the little one! She will be an opera-singer when she grows up. Her eyes! Her movements!'

'Play again! Play us another piece!' several of my new friends urged.

I rose and smiled sweetly. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' I said, bobbing to them, 'I, the actors and actresses, am too tired to re-open the theatre and set another piece before you.'

They dispersed unwillingly. When they had all

melted away, and we were left to ourselves, I turned with asperity to the One-eyed Calender. 'You took my thirteen soldi!' I cried in an aggrieved tone. For he had promptly pocketed them.

'Yes,' the Signora answered, nodding her head. 'We took them, *naturalmente*. Thou owest us for arrears of board and lodging.'

I reflected a moment. That was true. I had eaten their bread; I had accepted their *panettone*. But still—thirteen soldi! It was a power of money. I glanced at Roméo, tucked up neatly in bed in his ragged tunic. The commercial spirit awakened within me. I was not aware just then that I was fighting the battle of the proletariate against the capitalist, like my Father; but I felt my soul burn that the One-eyed Calender should appropriate the whole of my petty earnings in return for bare board and problematical lodging. Besides, this thing might grow. The Calender himself had prophesied, 'She will go far'; and I saw he had reason. If the people of this insignificant village could give me thirteen soldi in pieces of one or two centesimi each, what might I not hope to earn in the great rich cities?

I struck for the rights of labour.

'See here,' I said argumentatively; 'what I have done to-night, that I can do elsewhere. I can dance and sing, and tell tales of mermaids, and make wooden dolls talk, and so earn money. You may keep some of it, to buy me food and all that; but I ought to touch half for myself. That is but bare justice.'

When John Stodmarsh taught me political economy long after, I glowed with pride to think that from the first, though firm for the rights of labour, I was quite prepared to be just to capital.

My demand of fifty per cent. for the toiler, however, made the capitalists tremble in their torn shoes. And indeed I perceive now that it was a greater proportion than labour can ever expect to earn, before the socialist millennium. The Signora cried, 'Nonsense!' I could see she was inexorable. She was for giving me nothing. But the Calender interposed. He was a man; and I hope 'tis no treason to my sex to admit that, in matters of business, I have found men proner to compromise than women.

'Thou art right,' he said to me slowly, after a brief marital altercation with the Signora in the unknown language. 'I can see it with one eye. Thou sayest well that thou oughtest to touch something. Still, we pay for thy food, and we secure thee lodging——'

'Where necessary,' I put in gravely.

He winced. 'Where necessary,' he went on, accepting the correction. 'For that, we naturally deserve to be recouped. We took thee as a fellow-wayfarer, expecting to recoup ourselves. This is a world, reflect, Rosalba, of nothing for nothing. But we acknowledge thy claim to a share, if this luck should hold. In that case'—he put his head on one side, keeping it as straight for the nonce as St. Vitus would permit, and screwed his face up insinuatingly—'in that case, we would allow thee one sou in ten on

all thou earnest.' He stared at me hard. 'I call the offer liberality.'

One sou in ten! My gorge rose at it. Ten per cent. alone as the miserable pittance offered to labour! (I did not know at the time it was ten per cent., but I resisted instinctively the aggression of the capitalist.) 'Let us be reasonable,' I said, sitting down and facing him. 'I allow that you have fed me, and sometimes even housed me; but my food and lodging are not expensive. I give you my lowest terms. One soldo in five! Come; 'tis an ultimatum!' I did not quite know what an ultimatum might be, but I knew it was the sort of proposal my Father had flung at the Austrian Emperor's head, and that after he had once launched an ultimatum nobody ever said anything further.

'One soldo in five? But 'tis ruin. Why, what wouldst thou do with it?'

I tossed my head. 'My affair! One soldo in five! An ultimatum. Take it—or leave it.'

The Signora interposed. She saw the One-eyed Calender visibly waver. She tried a subterfuge. 'One soldo in ten, up to ten soldi; one in five for all you earn after.'

I stamped my foot. 'I have spoken my ultimatum,' I cried. 'One in five—or nothing. I am free to leave you. How often should I ever earn more than ten? But that is not the point. You have heard my terms. An ultimatum is an ultimatum.'

The One-eyed Calender put his left thumb to his teeth and stared at me fixedly. Then he spoke

again in the unknown tongue to the Signora. She gave way sullenly, letting her hands drop by her side. From that day forth, the One-eyed Calender respected me enormously.

And, indeed, I am not built of the stuff that meekly yields to the tyranny of capital. I stood up for my rights from the first. I had left my comfortable and luxurious home—the well-provided home of a landed proprietor on the Monti Berici—for freedom's sake, and voluntarily embraced the hard life of the road, that I might be my own mistress. And was I then to knuckle down before arrogant capitalism? Was this one-eyed Rothschild in a tattered shirt and a small way of business to walk over me roughshod (in his second-hand boots), simply because he had managed to possess himself of the reserve-fund of food-stuffs in the shape of *panettone*, and the instruments of production in his strident grinding-wheel? Ten thousand times no! The blood of the Lupari rose against such oppression.

I did not yet know how much or how little I might be likely to earn by my artistic energies; but from the very first night I made up my mind to this—that what I earned should be my own, not any complexion of capitalist's. I fought for a principle. The principle would be the same if I were Patti and he the impresario of some famous opera-house.

So we went on our way towards Paris, rejoicing—and also sorrowing, just as the mood and the market took us. On, past white towns that jut on pro-

montories; on, past bays of oily sea, zoned with belts of darker and lighter blue like watered silk; on, up the dry rocks that hem in the Rhône valley. At first, I aspired to no more than such unpremeditated dramatic exhibitions—mere spontaneous play of a child with her puppets. But as time went on, and I began to earn more, I took greater pains with the study of my monologue, and also incidentally with my scenery and dresses. At some places in Provence we made as much as twenty or thirty sous in a day; and then it became apparent that, as a commercial speculation, it was worth our while to spend a trifle on tinsel and spangles, both for myself and my dollies. Ferdinand had now slashed sleeves to his doublet, and Miranda was richly dight in a rag of white satin—only three sous the triangular remnant, cut on the bias! Bit by bit the fantastic performance grew, till, as we reached the centre of France, I had developed into a little impromptu actress, delivering monologues half-remembered from books, half of my own composition, and interspersed with puppet-shows and appropriate dances. I managed it all out of my own head, without even imagining myself to be doing anything out of the common.

Another consequence was, that the Calender's wife found it worth her while to dress me properly. The Signora was herself a slattern, in that advanced stage of dissolution where pins have wholly superseded buttons: but she saw that it paid to keep me tidy. My Italian costume contributed not a little to

the success of the entertainment; people love that slight flavour of the alien and the exotic which raises art above the level of the commonplace. So, as our budget swelled, the Calender's wife took care to prank me out in a somewhat theatrical peasant garb, which recalled, I must confess, the Roman Campagna rather than my own Venetian mainland. This helped to preserve my self-respect; for I kept my head up. However ill my *padrone* and his wife might be attired, I at le.t went flashing through the towns of Provence in scarlet and orange.

At the outset, too, I trusted for my plots to memory. But in time I began to find my small repertory pall; besides, I forgot more and more the original books, and was thrown more and more on my inventive faculty. I am afraid the hash I made of *The Merchant of Venice* would have turned Sir Henry Irving's hair prematurely grey, could he only have heard it. I was still mainly dependent for subjects on Shakespeare, who, strange to say, knew what drama was quite as well as I did. I tried Dante, indeed, but found him wanting: Dante is *not* dramatic. *The Thousand and One Nights* supplied me with a play or two—notably Aladdin, and to a less degree Ali Baba—but the mass of the stories were caviare to the general. The name of Allah puzzled my hearers; and they were clearly at sea as to viziers and dervishes. These exotic terms, though I did not understand them, had given me no trouble —I suppose I was more imaginative; but they sufficed to render the Moslem tales unpalatable to

the ordinary French villager. I was quick to feel the pulse of my audiences. When I caught them yawning, I never repeated the proved failure.

As a rule, however, they were sympathy itself. I had a little introductory phrase which generally put us on the best of terms at the outset. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' I would begin, 'I shall have the honour of presenting to you the celebrated and fascinating drama of *The Tempest*: the part of Ferdinand'—I held him up—'by Signor Giovanni Fantoccino: the part of Miranda'—I tapped my chest—'by Signorina Rosalba Lupari. The other characters'—I tapped myself again—'by the whole strength of the company.' That always made them smile. They entered into the spirit of the thing, and we were friends immediately.

When we loitered awhile in great towns like Marseilles, Avignon, Lyons, Dijon, I lingered round the book-stalls at the street corners, and ventured to turn over the paper-covered volumes, especially those at twenty centimes. The stall-keepers proved kindly as a rule; my Italian costume and my evident eagerness piqued their curiosity. 'Is she droll, the little dancing-girl?' they asked one another. One of them gave me a book; 'twas at Orange; it was called *Œuvres Dramatiques de Molière*. That was a Talk-Book, something like my English one, but not quite so well suited for my personal purpose—less romantic and flexible. It lacked the element of Puck and Ariel. Nevertheless, I got good from it, and added to my repertory the story of Sganarelle.

Some books I read through, more or less, without buying them. Thus I learned in a certain whirling way the tale of Consuelo and that of the Tour de Nesle. Other books I bought with my own hoarded sous—they call soldi 'sous' in France, and centesimi 'centimes.' One was a glorious romance, by name *Les Trois Mousquetaires*; another, less useful, but which I loved far better, was a volume of poems by Alfred de Musset. English and Italian books were particularly cheap; a bookstall-keeper at Lyons, who heard me sing and saw me dance, gave me, instead of coppers, a volume of curious songs called *Sonnets* by one Petrarca, and the *Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. I do not know whether it was because English and Italian were my two mother tongues, but I loved those two books better than anything I ever read in French. I learned them by heart. They live with me always.

Two other English books I likewise acquired, and these helped me greatly. One was given me outright by a bookstall man, who saw me devouring it with eager eyes on his stall; it was called *Kenilworth* and was written by a certain Sir Walter Scott Bart. I admired that man Bart immensely—admired him more, indeed, than my maturer taste approves to-day; and I made a little tragedy for my puppets out of Amy Robsart's fate, which I still believe was not wholly devoid of rude dramatic merit.

The second book came to me in this fashion. I was playing on the Grand' Place at a Rhône town, whose name escapes me, and had made my usual

introduction, in its French form—'Messieurs et Mesdames, I shall have the pleasure of representing before you this evening the famous and entertaining comedy of *The Merchant of Venice.* The part of Shylock the Jew, in this admirable work, will be sustained by M. Jean Marionette'—I held him up and dandled him—'the part of Portia by Mademoiselle Rosalba Lupari, formerly of the Royal Italian Opera, and of the principal theatres on the highroads of Italy.' As I spoke, I saw a bland-faced, stout, sweet-tempered-looking old gentleman attracted by my performance. He lounged up and listened, sedately happy. He was one of a class higher than those who ordinarily patronised me—I knew him by his black coat and loose black tie for one of those hateful *bourgeois.* But he stood long and smiled a paternal smile at all my sallies. His presence inspired me: I was brighter than my wont. When I had finished, he laid his hand on my head and beamed on me charmingly.

'My child,' he said, in an exquisitely soft and musical voice, 'thou wilt go far. How didst thou learn Shakespeare?'

'Is that Shakespeare, monsieur?' I answered, blushing.

'Ay, marry, is it?' he replied in English, with a marked foreign accent. 'Where did you read it?'

I told him my history. 'But I have forgotten much of the words as they ran in the book,' I continued sadly. 'I remember for the most part the story only.'

He pressed his kindly hand on my head once more. It was a large soft hand. 'We shall remedy that, my child,' he answered, with a delicious intonation. 'Come this way with me.' There was a caress in his '*Viens ici!*'

He led me to a shop and bought me a brand-new copy, well printed, and stoutly bound. 'A pen, *je vous prie*,' he said, and, leaning over, wrote his name and mine in it. His writing was small and daintily beautiful. 'There, little one,' he said, handing it to me, 'thou wilt be famous some day. When thou art, remember, I beg of thee, that the snuffy old gentleman who gave thee this prophesied thy greatness.'

I looked at the inscription :—

'À Mademoiselle Rosalba Lupari,

Enfant, mais artiste,

Hommage prophétique d'un vieillard,

Ernest Renan.'

I seized the old gentleman's hand and kissed it with effusion many times over. Only years after did I come to know the real value of that gift. I possess it still, and naturally number it among my most cherished treasures. But even then, the true French politeness of the one word 'Mademoiselle' went home to my heart. He saw I was no beggar.

This episode may lead you rashly to suppose that I am the famous Signorina Lupari, the renowned singer. There, you guess too hastily. It is Mariana who—— But you shall hear in the sequel.

Thus I owned a Shakespeare again, and was enabled to enlarge and enrich my répertoire by many new plots and many new episodes. Of course I altered and adapted them all to my own fashion. What suits the Lyceum does not necessarily suit a one-child play with dances and puppets.

I shall only add a single point further about this phase of my existence. Of course I was mistaken in supposing that we should make more in the great rich towns than in the scattered villages. The great rich towns had already their theatres, their Alcazars, their *cafés chantants*; they despised my poor little self-taught exhibitions. But the smaller the village, the more was I appreciated, especially in warm Provence and warm Liguria. The land of the troubadours has not yet forgotten the echoing tradition of spontaneous song. It loves the *improvisatore*. There, and there alone, we have still peasant poets. The volcanic soul of the lava-hills makes Provence a Bacchante. She understood my native wood-notes wild as Paris and London could never understand them. To this day, I can hold spellbound a group of children on my Italian hills with what critical London would coldly describe as 'an intensely feeble and amateurish performance.'

Often in our wanderings we passed a church. I

would drop in at times and let fall a prayer to Our Lady or the dear Saints. Not for my own welfare. I do not think I troubled myself much about the state of my soul—it was a gay, flighty, happy-go-lucky little soul—but I did pray that I might live to see once more my dear Father.

CHAPTER VIII

I CHANGE MASTERS

As I increased in commercial value to the One-eyed Calender, I could note that he grew more and more jealous of keeping me. If his brother-tramps seemed to pay me attentions, he hung nervously near, and called me off whenever he thought they might snatch a chance of talking alone with me.

For myself, I knew my worth (as an article of commerce) and used it for a lever to prevent what I most hated—injustice.

Once, as we were approaching Paris, the Calender was harsh to me. I had done some small thing awkwardly. 'Goose!' he cried, seizing my arm hard.

'Take care!' I said, shaking him off, with flashing eyes. 'I lay the golden eggs. Beware of killing me!'

'I do not think to kill thee,' he answered.

'Or driving me away—which comes to the same thing,' I added.

'Thou art too proud, child. What wouldst do if thou shouldst leave us?'

'My affair once more,' I replied. 'I can take care of myself. I came to you of my own free-will; of

my own free-will I can equally quit you. What *I* came for was—freedom.'

He looked at me curiously. 'The child grows too wise,' he muttered to his wife. 'She waxes faster in wisdom than in stature.'

At last we reached Paris—garish, wonderful, coquettish Paris. From afar the tawny glare of electric lights, reflected on the sky above a dusty road, announced its neighbourhood. We straggled in, over miles upon miles of suburban pavement, more footsore than usual. Paris needed us not. Her scissors were all sharp, her amusements ready-made. What should such as we do in the capital of civilisation?

We stayed but three days. In those three days a new situation developed itself.

We had taken up our abode in a tramps' lodging-house in the Montmartre quarter, specially patronised by Italians. Its squalor was unspeakable. On the last day of our stay, the Calender slouched in—without the Signora.

'What have you done with her?' I asked, looking up from my polenta.

He waggled his head, between the spasms of St. Vitus, expanded both arms, with hands palm outward, and gasped out feebly, 'How should I know? I never expect to see her. Henceforth, thou and I must travel the world, alone, together.'

'Certainly not,' I answered, for I was nearly fourteen, and had a clear idea what the world was made of. 'Without the Signora, it is not *convenable* for me to remain with you one day longer.'

He shrugged his shoulders with a helpless air. 'She is gone,' he repeated, endeavouring to keep his head still, so as to look impressive. 'I never again expect to see her.'

What had really happened to her I never knew. I had various surmises. Perhaps they had merely quarrelled; perhaps he had murdered her and thrown her into the Seine; perhaps she had gone off, a squalid Héloise with some more squalid Abélard; perhaps she had managed to provoke our constant enemies, the police, and he (like a man) had saved himself by deserting her. But, at any rate, she was gone. With that patent element of the problem I had most to concern myself.

I acted promptly. 'In that case,' I said, 'we part —this evening!'

'You mean it, Rosalba?'

'But, certainly.'

To my immense astonishment, the One-eyed Calender did the last thing I should have expected of him—burst into tears, and rocked himself to and fro. 'You will not desert a poor old man, *carina*, in his hour of trouble!'

I was adamant. 'Nothing else is possible.'

Our temporary neighbours crowded round, seeing the chance of a squabble, perhaps a fight—which, next to a funeral, is the chief public amusement in a tramps' lodging-house. Some of them began to condole. One, who was an organ-grinder, with a villainous full-fed face and a stubby black ring of beard an eighth of an inch long, rough and razorable

—a more practical soul—came forward with an offer. He diffused a delicate perfume of garlic. I had nicknamed him mentally (as a reminiscence of *Macbeth*) the First Murderer.

'The girl can dance,' he said, eyeing me sideways. 'A dancer goes better with grinding music than with grinding scissors. And I have a wife—a fact which will meet the Signorina's delicate scruples. I will take her off your hands. How much do you want for her? *Quanto volete—quanto?*'

'I am not a slave,' I murmured, drawing back half-angrily.

The One-eyed Calender wiped his finger across his mouth, as an aid to reflection. He calculated off-hand the net value of a recalcitrant companion who declined to accompany him, and arrived at a properly modest figure. 'She is *worth* twenty francs,' he said, eyeing me as one eyes a chicken for sale; 'but'—with a generous recklessness—'you can have her for fifteen.'

I made no comment.

They higgled over me for some time, the vendor dwelling much on my artistic accomplishments and my knowledge of English: the purchaser admitting that he was bound for England, but ungallantly disparaging my other merits.

'Now, thirteen francs!' he said insinuatingly, as if it were a Dutch auction. 'Come, come! she is leaving you.'

'Fifteen. Speaks English.'

'Thirteen, fifty. A mere street-singer!'

'Fifteen. Good eyelashes, and earns plenty!'

At last they settled terms on the basis of a compromise—fourteen francs down, and a glass of absinthe.

I bided my time. When all was arranged, and the money about to change hands in solid bronze (for silver was rare with us) I interposed quietly, 'Seven francs goes to me, please!'

'And why?' they both exclaimed, astonished.

'I am not yours to buy and sell. I object to this transaction. I will go with the Signore organ-grinder, because he has a lady of his own, and because I see nothing else now possible. But if he pays you fourteen francs for me, I claim half of it. No slavery! *République française: liberté, égalité, fraternité!* Otherwise I upset your coach altogether by declining to travel with him.'

The One-eyed Calender clasped his hands and made piteous appeals to Our Lady, the saints, and my personal feelings. I took no heed of them. A duenna is a duenna, so I was ready for the arrangement: but why I should be trafficked like a Cuban negress—I, the daughter of the man who had freed Italy? In the end the vendor gave in and I got my money.

'But you engage to remain with me,' the First Murderer added, as an afterthought.

I eyed him suspiciously. His face was by no means reassuring. '*Ma che! ma che!* I make no promise. You were willing to buy me on chance from my *padrone*, who has no kind of claim to me; and you

must abide the result. If you suit me, I stop with you; if you fail to please me—*tra-la-la! la-ra! zim-boum!* I go elsewhere.'

The First Murderer glanced significantly at the One-eyed Calender. The One-eyed Calender shrugged his shoulders. I guessed what they meant. The one said with his eyebrows, 'A wise man would have stopped this earlier'; the other said with his open palms, ''Tis less easy than it seems to curb the young rebel.'

'Then thou wilt start with us to-morrow?' the First Murderer observed a little later, after further conference with my recent owner.

The old Eve asserted herself within me. 'Not if you *thou* me,' I answered quietly; for I knew the respect due to the daughter of so grand a gentleman as an ex-waiter at Gatti's. 'It must be *you* at the very least.' We Italians, I may say in explanation, possess four delicate gradations of courtesy in our personal pronouns; they vary from *thou*, the lowest, through *you* and *they*, the middle terms, to *she*, the most honorific of all, which is short for 'Your Excellency.' I had debated at first whether I should not compel my new *padrone* to call me *lei*, but I decided at last that for the present *voi* would meet the exigencies of the situation. I was going up gradually. When the One-eyed Calender first *thou'd* me, I was still a child, and children are always *thou*; now, I was a girl of nearly fourteen, and exacted my due from the First Murderer.

He made a wry face. 'I have not bought much

for my fourteen francs,' he muttered. 'But still—we shall see . . . when I get her to England!'

His face was black; he somehow looked like a huge dark spider: but his threats did not disturb me. Once in England, I knew I had the English tongue, while he would be merely an Italian organ-grinder.

'Tis in the blood of the Lupari to fear disgrace, and fear naught else.

Next day we set out from Paris, along the Great North Road, for Amiens and England.

I do not purpose to trouble you with the details of my career in the First Murderer's company: 'twas a transient episode; though my new master was 'the very devil incarnation'—a Bluebeard, I thought, with a touch of Don Juan. We made our way gradually by Amiens and Abbeville to Boulogne; thence we took the night boat, third-class, to Folkestone.

From the coast it was the First Murderer's plan to grind his way to London by slow stages through the villages of the highroad. But here, fate turned on me. In Picardy I had found my audiences somewhat smaller than in the South, and decidedly more niggard of small copper coin, yet attentive and appreciative. The moment I crossed over to England, a great and immediate change became apparent. The English people were so odd: I 'tried confusions with them.' I played one of my little dramas—I think it was the story of Oberon and Titania—before a Kentish audience on a wayside green in a sweet

rustic village. Elizabethan half-timbered houses fronted the play-stow: yet, to my surprise and chagrin, the villagers looked on listlessly at first, then burst out in coarse laughter. Burning in the face, I danced and worked my puppets; my audience gazed at me with the wrong kind of merriment. They laughed, not with me, but at me. The harder I exerted myself to please them, the more did they grin at me for a silly foreign idiot. I flushed and bit my lip: I held back my tears: I knew I was beaten. It was my first great artistic disappointment;—a Christmas gambol or a tumbling trick, I had nothing to offer that these English cared for.

I slunk off to bed that night in the Fisherman's Arms, a limp, broken creature. Could these be Shakespeare's countrymen? Though I had been so long away from England, in outlandish parts, I still retained my native British sense that what the English liked must be the standard of taste; and the discovery that my work was not good enough for England cut the solid ground from beneath me like an earthquake. I had come to my own, and my own rejected me.

I know now, of course, that the romantic and artistic peoples of the Mediterranean lands entered into my fantastic mood sympathetically, and loved what I offered them: the coarse and full-fed English rustics did not understand my monologue or my acting; they preferred a circus. A conjurer's dog, jumping through fire amid red-covered hoops, meant more to these clods than my tripping Titania.

Indeed, my heart sank when I tried to translate into my most native mother-tongue the well-worn phrases that had told so often in France and Italy. 'The part of Oberon by Mr. John Puppet' had not the ghost of a laugh in it. The Kentish rustics stared, and seemed to think me mad. In England, at least, it was not in villages that I was to find encouragement.

CHAPTER IX

GOOD SOCIETY

I WAS over twelve when I left the dear Monti Berici, with their tunnels of vine-trellis: I was full fourteen by the time that I landed in England. But the exceptional advantages in the way of education which I had enjoyed meanwhile made me older than my years. At an age when most girls are wasting their days over learning by rote that which will avail them nothing, I had acquired an amount of firsthand knowledge that was to stand me in good stead throughout my later life. In place of the dates of Anglo-Saxon kings, and the useless mysteries of tare and tret, I had had direct contact with affairs. I had learnt languages and the value of money. My poor little plays had taught me at least the habit of literary composition. Even from the point of view of culture, it was no small matter that I had lived with Shakespeare, Dante, Molière, De Musset, Shelley.

Not that I loved my more immediate human companions. My life was in the ideal. The First Murderer, I may say, did not take my fancy. He was a malign, unshaven Adonis of fifty, and he had a trick of leering which displeased me. We had got

half-way to London, or further, however, when an episode occurred which severed our connection.

The First Murderer's wife went off into a village one morning to buy bread, leaving her husband and myself to light the fire for the kettle by the roadside. We were camped on a common, with abundance of brushwood. While she was gone, and I was blowing the embers, the Murderer, with an odious leer, began to talk to me in a low and blandishing voice, praising my beautiful eyes and making other unnecessary remarks about my personal appearance. He was a slimy creature. His face came so close to mine as he spoke that I could feel his hot garlic-laden breath on my cheek.

I did not value his admiration. There are people who are most loathsome when they try to make love. But I would not let him see I was afraid. 'Pray do not trouble to continue,' I said in my coldest voice. 'I have seen myself in a mirror. Also, your conversation bores me.'

He drew still nearer. 'But, *bella mia*,' he cried, ogling.

'Keep off!' I said, drawing back.

'You are cruel, dear child!'

I rose with a look that quelled him. 'Good morning,' I murmured abruptly. 'I have had enough of you. Do not dare to say one word. I go my own way.' And I turned and left him.

He was too much astonished to follow me, thinking no doubt I would return (for breakfast) in a few minutes.

But I had no intention of returning. I strolled off by myself, in the most casual mood—up a path that led obliquely along a spur of the downs—without the slightest notion what I meant to do, yet satisfied with the sunshine, the green trees, the song of birds in the copses. A scent of dog-roses stole on tiptoe from the neighbouring hedgerows. The sky was a blue vault—blue with a fathomless deep English blue, relieved here and there by fleecy white clouds. In Italy we never see it a blue like that—not the clear and profound ultramarine of England; our skies are mostly pallid and dimly hazy. The freshness of spring and of chalk country met one's face in the air—an indefinable freshness, as of sprouting green things and bursting seeds: the turf on the downs spread close and springy. It yielded under one's feet. In the distance a wedge of sea just showed itself through a gap. I mounted and mounted, trolling out my stave as I went—and without the remotest idea how I could get a dinner. Blame nature, if you disapprove: *she* made me a Bohemian.

At the end of the steep footpath which I had taken haphazard in my haste, a road ran among beeches: a highroad on the hilltop, like the ridge of a hog's back. I followed it a few yards and saw an open gateway, with solid stone balls capping the square pillars. The gateway gave access to the grounds of a great house: an avenue lined with rhododendrons led up to it. I turned in past the lodge as if the place belonged to me. I did not yet

understand the peculiar sanctity which attaches in England to the landed interest. Perhaps had I understood it, even a gay little iconoclast like myself might have feared to intrude—in which case the whole course of my later life would have been totally different.

As it was, I strolled up the avenue, singing aloud as I walked. I trolled a gay song I had picked up in Paris. 'Twas nice to be thus alone, and to have cut myself loose from the One-eyed Calender, the First Murderer, and their respective Signore. *Pom, pom, pom*: I would be free, free, free—*que j'aime la liberté!* I sang it out loudly.

Presently, at a bend of the avenue, like a sudden Gorgon in the garden of the Hesperides, an old gentleman faced me.

He was a fruity old gentleman, somewhat red in the face, and extremely well-fed; he carried the mark of long good-feeding obtrusively before him. He was placidly self-satisfied. His features were an epitome of the landed interest.

He stared at me, amazed at such exotic insolence. A little Italian girl, tricked out in a theatrical fancy-dress costume, trespassing on *his* grounds—and not only trespassing, but singing as she trespassed! I think he could scarce believe his eyes; I know he rubbed them twice before he accosted me.

Then he spoke severely. 'Look here, child, what's this you're doing? These are private grounds.'

'Oh, that's all right,' I answered. 'I'm a private person.' And I strolled calmly past him.

He opened his mouth with a curious drop of surprise, and stared at me mutely, while his red face grew redder. His look was one of cool remonstrant bewilderment. At first, I think, he hardly knew whether to be angry or not. But, after a moment, his brain worked—it took it a perceptible interval to recover from the shock—the corners of his mouth twitched, and he burst out laughing.

'Well, of all the unconcerned young vagabonds I ever did see!' he cried, gazing at me as if I were on exhibition.

'Don't look at me so,' I said; 'I am not a toad.'

'I suppose you belong to an organ-grinder,' he went on, resting his huge bulk on his stick behind him.

'I belong to myself,' I answered, confronting him. 'Do you take me for a Circassian? Slaves cannot breathe in England. 'Tis the home of the brave and the land of the free. Rule, Britannia!'—this I sang—'Britannia rules the waves! Bri-tons never, *never*, NEVER—shall—be—slaves!'

He regarded me fixedly. He was never in a hurry. 'But *you're* no Briton,' he objected with a glance up and down at my Italian finery.

'Born in the parish of St. Pancras,' I retorted with glib ease, quoting Mariana's favourite boast. 'That's English enough, is it not?'

'Then why peacock about in this toggery?' He pointed contempt at my Italian garb with one fat red hand.

'You need not turn your nose up at it,' I replied.

'Tis the sign of my ancestry. My Father was a Garibaldian, who freed Italy.'

'And now he grinds an organ!'

'You jump at conclusions,' I cried, growing warm, and drawing myself up. 'He does nothing of the sort.' I assumed my best Coriolanus tone. 'He is a landed proprietor on the Monti Berici near Vicenza.'

That avowal produced an immediate effect upon the corpulent old gentleman. The one thing in this world that he really respected was Landed Property. He spelt it with mental capitals. The word made him stare harder than ever. 'Then why does his daughter trapes about the world like this?' he asked in an incredulous voice.

'Home-keeping youth have ever homely wits,' I answered, looking upon him. Then I burst out singing again, '*Pom, pom, pom! que j'aime la liberté!*'

His face was a study of utter puzzlement. He put his fat red hands where his hips should have been, and stood gazing at me vacantly. 'Can't you read that notice?' he said at last, pointing to the usual board with its vulgar threat of 'Trespassers will be prosecuted.'

'I have read it,' I answered; 'it's not very original. Besides, I suppose you pray, Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.'

He turned toward the house in the background, and cried aloud, 'Mrs. Mallory! Mrs. Mallory! come here at once; I have something to show you.'

I dropped a little bob. 'Thanks for *thinging* me,' I put in saucily. 'Some*body* would have been politer.'

'Gracious heavens!' he ejaculated. 'The infant is going to teach me manners!'

Mrs. Mallory hurried down from the verandah of the big house. She was a bright and gracious-looking middle-aged lady, artistically dressed in a divinely lovely gown of some loose light material, and artistic in expression.

'Well, Sir Hugh?' she said in an inquiring tone.

The corpulent old gentleman pointed towards me with his stick from a safe distance. 'This is a Phenomenon,' he said solemnly.

The lady inspected me with a kindly smile. I love the bright smile of an English lady. There is so much heart in it. 'This is a model,' she answered, laughing. 'A splendid model. Such exquisite curves and plenitudes in her contours!'

'What do you think she said to me?' Sir Hugh went on, gasping. 'I said, "You can't come in here; these are private grounds"; and the little minx looked up at me—cucumbers couldn't compare with her—and plumps out, as jaunty as can be, "That's all right; I'm a private person." Plumps it out to *me*, in my own grounds.' And he laughed again at the bare recollection of my foreign audacity.

'She seems a pretty brazen piece of goods,' the lady admitted, still scanning me, but smiling.

'Not brazen,' I answered, flushing up; 'vivacious—that's all. Tra-la-la—*pom, pom, pom! zim boum!* 'Tis the southern blood in me.'

They interchanged quick glances. Mrs. Mallory's face grew suddenly grave. 'But—you are a lady,

my child,' she said. 'Tell me all about yourself. I didn't think you understood English or I would not have spoken so.'

I was in the gayest possible mood, having just sloughed off the First Murderer and all his works: but the strange touch of kindness in the lady's voice, so long unknown to me, went through me like a knife. I swallowed a sob; then my heart was too much for me. I sat down by the trunk of a big beech and burst out crying. In a second, Mrs. Mallory was kneeling by my side and bending over me with tender sympathy. It was years since I had known tenderness, and it cut me to the quick. I sobbed harder and harder. I could not control myself.

She led me up to the great house, and took me into a drawing-room. It was the 'grandest' room I had ever been in; Mariana would have revelled in it. And indeed, Sir Hugh Tachbrook, to whom the place belonged, was one of the richest men in that part of England. She seated me on the sofa—such a soft, reposeful, luxurious sofa!—and waited patiently by my side till I should recover from my paroxysm. Once or twice Sir Hugh interposed a remark, offering advice or consolation—sal volatile or brandy and water: but Mrs. Mallory shook her head and answered in French, which she clearly imagined I would not understand, 'No, no; let the poor child cry it out; it is the only plan. She is unaccustomed to kindness: that takes her breath away.'

I was grateful to her for those words; grateful—

and surprised to learn that there existed in the world other people who could understand, who felt and thought and spoke as I did.

Like a flash it came over me, 'These people are my sort. I have been living all my life in alien company. Mrs. Mallory is like myself, and Miranda and Rosalind.'

Slowly and gradually I cried my stock of tears out. I calmed my inner tumult as soon as I could, for Mrs. Mallory's sake, for I could see that my weeping distressed her. But I clasped her hand tight all the time with a recurrent pressure; and each time I pressed, her hand pressed back again. Touch is the mother-sense of the emotions. In that unspoken sympathy we seemed to read and draw near to one another.

At last she rose, and glided softly from the room for a minute. When she returned she brought in a cake and a glass of milk. She cut me a big slice. 'Eat that, my child,' she said gently, handing it to me.

I was hungry as a hawk that morning, having had no breakfast except a piece of dry bread, so I wiped my eyes and ate it, not greedily I hope, but with evident enjoyment. Sir Hugh looked on, grave doubt in his glance. 'Do you think it is too rich for her?' he asked Mrs. Mallory.

'Rich!' I answered, smiling up at him through my tears; ''tis a perfect Crœsus of a cake.'

They both laughed and interchanged glances once more. I felt how nice it was to be among people

who were well-read like oneself, and who understood the meaning of an allusion. The One-eyed Calender and the First Murderer understood so little; and even my peasant audiences, though they followed my plays, missed many small points in them. They knew not Crœsus.

My new friends talked to me for some time, asking me questions about myself and my mode of life. I answered frankly, telling them the story of the One-eyed Calender and the First Murderer, and my impromptu Shakespearian representations, and the book that the old gentleman in France had given me. My odd, fanciful names for persons and things amused them. When I spoke of my plays, Mrs. Mallory asked me to give her a specimen. I clapped my hand to my head. 'Impossible!' I answered with tragic despair (after Juliet). 'The First Murderer has my costumes, my properties, my dolls and dresses!'

Mrs. Mallory rose promptly. 'That will do,' she said with decision to Sir Hugh. 'She is the very model I want. She poses splendidly. Such suppleness of limb! The real thing, not wooden imitation. I must make some arrangement.' She rang the bell. 'Simpson,' she went on, 'ask that Italian man to step this way.'

A minute later the First Murderer entered, conical hat in hand, much abashed and trembling. Big and burly as he was, he seemed afraid of the drawing-room, while as for me, I had entered it as though drawing-rooms ought always to have belonged to me.

I saw at once what had happened. They had sent out searchers and found the man while I was crying and eating my cake, and had asked him to come in and confront me.

'She says that she is not your daughter,' Mrs. Mallory began in Italian, which she spoke with fair fluency.

The First Murderer shrugged his shoulders and opened two demonstrative palms. 'She is a bad girl, signora,' he answered in his slimy voice, glaring at me sidelong with a furtive glare. 'She would say anything to get away from her father and mother.'

I recognised at once that I had the advantage of him in this discussion, because he could only speak Italian, which I understood, while I could speak English, which he did not follow. 'It is not true,' I cried in English to Mrs. Mallory. 'I am *not* his daughter. My father is Signor Antonio Lupari, of the Monti Berici, near Vicenza. If you do not believe me, you can write and ask him.'

My openness carried conviction. 'Sounds straight,' Sir Hugh admitted. In a very few words, I told them the rest of my little story. Mrs. Mallory listened and clearly believed me. 'But I suppose we must pay something to this ruffian,' she said at last to Sir Hugh, 'just to make him relinquish his imaginary claim upon her.'

'Not one penny!' I cried firmly. 'The man is a cheat. Don't let him worm a single sou out of you.'

The First Murderer cringed and scraped. Though

he did not understand their words, he could see that they were ready to pay, and that I opposed his interests; and he glanced at me as if he would choke me. His fingers fumbled nervously. '*Microbe!*' he muttered between his teeth. But I fought it out with him undaunted, in very voluble Italian. At last he threw up his hands in pantomimic despair. 'Give me what I paid for her, then,' he exclaimed as the honest man wronged, flinging his lie to the winds. 'I bought the little animal in Paris, and gave her last owner thirty francs for her.'

'It is not true,' I broke in, in English, to Mrs. Mallory. 'He gave fourteen francs and a glass of absinthe.'

They laughed again at my vehemence, and at the nature of the bargain. But after some higgling, Mrs. Mallory yielded, and compromised the matter for twenty shillings down. The First Murderer was to relinquish all claim to my guardianship. I was to have my few bits of clothing, my dolls, and my properties, and above all the book that the old gentleman gave me.

The money was paid in hand, and the First Murderer, clutching it, backed out by degrees, always slimy, and bowing many times, but casting a farewell scowl at me. As soon as he was gone, Mrs. Mallory turned to where I stood. 'Now, you are mine, my child,' she said, smiling. 'I have bought you and paid for you.'

I jumped at her and kissed her hand. 'No; not yours,' I answered, bending over it and letting a tear

fall warm on it. 'My own. You are a sweet, kind lady, and I should love to serve you. But I was not his to sell. I am my own—my own—a free Italian!'

Mrs. Mallory laughed, and turned to Sir Hugh. 'A young individualist, you see,' she murmured softly.

Sir Hugh grunted a grumpy grunt. 'A young rebel, *I* call it!' he answered. 'People don't know their proper places nowadays. Especially womenkind. She's a saucy little baggage, and I wish you joy of her!'

'What do you want me to do?' I asked of my new friend confidingly; for I felt she had taken my future into her own hands, and when I looked at her face I was willing to let it rest there.

'Come to my house and see,' she answered, rising.

I looked about me, a little sorry. 'Oh, then this is *not* your house,' I said, with a shade of disappointment.

'Oh no, not mine; this is Sir Hugh Tachbrook's,' with a wave of the hand towards the fat old gentleman.

'I wish it was yours!' I cried, surveying it.

'Hear, hear!' Sir Hugh exclaimed with warmth. (He had been in Parliament, I learned later.) 'That's the most sensible thing the child has said yet, Mrs. Mallory. Go on like *that*, you young monkey, and I'll begin to think better of you. It is no fault of mine that this is not her house—but she's an obdurate creature.'

Mrs. Mallory glanced at him pleadingly. 'You

promised me, Sir Hugh,' she said, in a very low voice. 'How can I come here again if you continue to persecute me? I like you as a dear and valued old friend. But if you insist on trying to make me alter my resolve——'

Sir Hugh was all penitence. 'My dear lady,' he murmured, stooping and kissing her hand submissively. 'I forget—I forget. But it shall not occur again. If you shut up the gate you will drive me to distraction.'

For myself, I listened with the intensest interest. These people talked and thought like the people in my books. I felt I had escaped from the world that did not understand me to the society in which I had always mixed—in fancy.

It is beyond a doubt that each one of us lives a daydream life as well as a practical one. My daydream life seemed about to realise itself.

CHAPTER X

A NEW PROFESSION

SHE led me across the lawn and through a little copse of larches at the side to a gate in a hedge. I understood at once, being a girl and a southerner, that this was the gate of which Sir Hugh had just spoken; it joined their properties; and Mrs. Mallory must have threatened to close it if he repeated his attentions. On *his* side of the hedge, all was trim orderliness; on *hers*, all was rampant bowery luxuriance. We walked on through the answering but far more careless-ordered copse beyond the gate, and soon reached a cottage, ever so much smaller than Sir Hugh's great house, but oh, so pretty and picturesque! It had a rustic porch covered with old climbing honeysuckle, as well as a verandah, up whose rough wooden posts red roses clambered to peep in with curious eyes at the first-floor windows. The perfume of jasmine crept on the still air. 'Twas the sweetest little cottage I had ever beheld; I felt instinctively that an artist inhabited it.

Mrs. Mallory took me at once through a dainty little rose-leaf-scented drawing-room into a large bare hall behind of a sort which I had never before seen,

but which I recognised by intuition as a studio. Its furnishings were simple; its colours subdued. A great square of Saracenic tapestry blocked one wall. Pierced Moorish lamps hung from the ceiling. Pictures stood on easels about the centre of the room, finished or otherwise. One of them caught my eye. A tall and beautiful lady, undraped, save by her copious fair hair, patted a white horse, which she seemed just about to mount. Her face and form breathed exquisite purity. I stood and stared at it.

'You like it?' Mrs. Mallory said, watching me close.

I drew a deep breath. 'It is lovely,' I answered. 'Lovely!' My eyes hung on it.

This undisguised and unfeigned admiration seemed to please her not a little. I was such an unsophisticated natural critic. 'It is Lady Godiva,' she explained, lingering on it with the loving eyes of a creator. 'She is just going to ride through the streets of Coventry.'

'I don't know that story,' I replied. 'It's not in Shakespeare.' I had heard of Coventry only in connection with Falstaff.

'No, but it 's in Tennyson.'

The name was still a name to me. I looked blank. Mrs. Mallory, observing my face, and intent, no doubt, on drawing me out, fetched a small green book, opened a page, and handed it to me. 'Read aloud,' she said. I read aloud. The poem began—'I waited for the train at Coventry.' I read it dramatically, drinking it in as I went. The verse

thrilled me through and through. I felt with that one reading that I had discovered a new poet. Discovered him for myself, which is the great matter. Mrs. Mallory's eyes were fixed upon me as I rolled out the liquid lines. 'Why, my child,' she cried, 'you are an actress! Some day I must see you do one of your little sketches.'

'Would you like to see me now?' I cried. And, nothing loth, I dressed up Portia, Antonio, and Shylock, and gave her my childish version of *The Merchant of Venice.*

Time after time, as I went on, she clapped her hands and cried, 'Stop, for a moment!' then she made a quick pencil-sketch of some attitude or gesture. I had never heard of professional models till then, but I understood at once what she wanted. As soon as I had finished, she laid down her note-book and said to me quietly, 'Now, Rosalba, do you think you would like to live here and let me paint you?'

I cast up at her a quick glance. 'No Lady Godivas!' I said with firmness.

She laughed. 'I shall not want you for the nude,' she answered. 'You know what that means?' I nodded. 'But for the draped figure, yes. Do you think you would care about it?'

I reflected. 'Yes, certainly,' I answered. 'It is an art, like another. I should prefer my own art best—but, I can find time for that; and yours'—I glanced at the canvas—'yours is beautiful!'

She smiled at me strangely. Then she took my

hand again. 'You are a queer little thing,' she said. 'A sort of native Eve—an untaught Beatrice. Where did you learn it all?'

'I was born so, I suppose. I have always read books and loved what I found in them.'

'But how did you know people painted from models, and especially from the nude?'

I paused to think. It had all come to me so naturally. 'Well, one sees artists painting hills and trees from nature,' I said, after a short mental search; 'and hills and trees must surely be easier to paint from imagination than people. And one sees artists painting groups in the street, all clothed and moving; but it must surely be easier to paint people clothed, as you see them every day and know them familiarly, than to paint them in their own bodies and limbs as you see them so few and so seldom. Still, one finds pictures painted like your Lady Godiva; and since they are so true to life, I suppose artists must have somebody as a model to paint them from.'

She perused me with some surprise. 'That is so,' she said slowly. 'But—I wonder you thought of it.'

'We learn to think of many things on the road,' I answered. 'It is a great university. You see, our livelihood depends upon observation. We should soon starve if we couldn't put two and two together.'

'And you object to starving?'

'Well, I may be narrow-minded, but—I have a prejudice against it.'

Mrs. Mallory paused. Then she unfolded her plan to me. 'I want you for a model,' she said. 'I will

paint you first in Italian costume—possibly afterwards in others. But not except in costume. And I shall want you to live with me. My gardener's wife might take you in, perhaps, and give you bed and breakfast. Your other meals you could have here with the servants.'

I demurred. 'I would rather have them with the gardener's wife, if I might,' I answered, flushing.

'Why?' She scanned me hard.

I hesitated. 'Well, I hardly know *why*. You think it odd of me, after the company I have kept. But somehow—the One-eyed Calender and the First Murderer were *not* servants. They were gentlemen of the road, but independent gentlemen.'

She pressed my hand again. 'You quaint little witch!' she exclaimed. 'I wonder how you discovered all these things! But you are right, quite right. There is nothing menial in gipsydom. You shall not mix with the servants. I recognise your claim to brevet-gentility.'

'Thank you!' I answered. 'I am not proud—beggars cannot be choosers—but I am the daughter of one of the men who fought to save Italy.' I was growing older now, and by this time, I think, it had begun to dawn upon me that my Father did not expel the Austrians *quite* single-handed.

'You will obey me in everything reasonable?' she asked, half-doubtful.

'Everything reasonable!' I cried. 'Everything *un*reasonable if it is your wish, dear lady.'

So all was shortly arranged. I was installed in

comfortable quarters in the gardener's cottage; I had a bed to sleep on; and the gardener's wife—a raw-boned lady with a broad Scotch accent—was told off to look after me. I took my meals at the cottage, and went up to the studio every morning to be painted. In point of fact, I had arrived at the psychological moment for Mrs. Mallory. As the butler at Sir Hugh's phrased it, I had 'copped her on the hop.' She was at work on a picture in which an Italian girl was a necessary element; and I came in the nick of time to fill the gap.

But I had piloted my ship at last into a delicious haven. I enjoyed being a model. Mrs. Mallory, with her tender smile and her sympathetic manner, became a real friend to me. There was something so reposeful about her face and figure. She moved with slow grace. Coffee-coloured laces belonged to her, of congruity. Her house was like herself—soft colours, velvety carpets, sheets that smelt of fresh lavender. It was a leisurely home, and she was a leisurely person. I understood her, and she understood me. After a few days' painting she said to me spontaneously, 'I see more and more that you were quite right about not having your meals with the servants, Rosalba. I ought never to have suggested it. Your place is here. You were born a lady.'

'So I think,' I answered, with my simple Italian matter-of-factness. 'I have always thought that; because, when I read about ladies in Shakespeare and Scott, Rosalind and Lucy Ashton seemed to me to think and feel exactly as I did.'

'You have read so much!' she put in.

'Well, it was easy for me,' I answered. 'You see, I hold the keys of three great literatures.'

She only stared at me: but her stare said many things.

Those weeks at Mrs. Mallory's, too, were a social education to me. Hitherto I had learnt from books only, or from contact with the sterner realities of life; now I began to learn how cultivated men and women talk, and to know something at first-hand of the mode of thought and feeling of English gentlefolk. That is a profound study which I have not yet lived long enough in England thoroughly to master—if anybody ever masters its endless intricacies—from squire to rural dean, from knighted soap-boiler to grammar-school master: but my life at Mrs. Mallory's sufficed to impress upon me some smattering of its meaning. I spent most of my days in the studio, and as Sir Hugh and others were constant visitors there, I heard much and learned much. Being by nature and disposition an actress and a mimic, this glimpse of a new world produced a great effect upon me. In a very few weeks I could imitate Sir Hugh on the scandalous fashion in which the labouring classes were getting things all their own way—'machinations of levellers, setting class against class'—and could discourse like Mrs. Mallory with rapt attention about textures and draperies, values and composition.

My new employer talked much to me while I sat for her, and we grew to be great friends. Indeed, the word *sat* gives a false idea of my usual attitude, for

my sitting was of a disjointed and episodic character. I ran about, chattered, struck attitudes, and gave Shakesperean representations at frequent intervals; and Mrs. Mallory took what she thought most important. She wanted me for hints, she said, not for regular sittings. My small audacities delighted her.

I spent the summer at Patchingham. The great tranquillity, the green stillness calmed me. In the early autumn Mrs. Mallory went up to London to give a private exhibition of her work in Bond Street.

'Would you like to come too, Rosalba?' she asked me.

Would I like to come too! I could not bear to be away from her. Affection for Mrs. Mallory was a plant of quick growth. She was more of a mother to me than any one else had ever been, and I told her so frankly, with southern impulsiveness. I think she was flattered, for she was really fond of me, and she never tired of asking me to give my little entertainments before visitors; but like a true Englishwoman, kind as she was, a certain barrier of birth prevented her from saying so. She had recognised that I was a lady—but only one of nature's ladies; while she herself was one of society's. That makes a difference still. And so, though she would hold my hand and make much of me, she never once kissed me—at this stage, I mean; for later on she learned to take a more natural view of me. That is the way with Englishwomen. Distinctions of blood count for more with them, and similarities of taste and nature

for less, than with the proudest aristocracy of continental Europe.

However, she took my hand now and answered warmly, 'Very well, then, dear; you shall come and wait about in the room. I shall want somebody with me. And I had rather it should be you, Rosalba, than anybody.'

Tears rose in my eyes. I brushed them away. Mrs. Mallory noticed them. 'Why do you cry, dear?' she asked me.

I gulped down a rising throat, and answered mendaciously, 'I was born in London, and now I am going back there.' I did not realise at the time that it is clean ridiculous for any one even to simulate a sentimental attachment towards London.

I am an infrequent kisser, but I longed for her to kiss me.

CHAPTER XI

VISTAS

MRS. MALLORY had a flat off Victoria Street, redolent of spikenard, cedar chests, and sandalwood. There we put up. It being necessary still to preserve the barrier, I took my meals downstairs with the housekeeper—an aggrieved-looking widow—and the hall porter, a contrast in jollity.

On the third day after our arrival in town, when we had almost finished hanging the pictures in the room in Bond Street, Mrs. Mallory gave a little inaugural luncheon-party to some special artistic friends and critics. It marked an epoch.

I had helped her not a little in dressing the rooms; suggesting here a bit of oriental drapery and there a decorative plate, with that half-unconscious touch of the æsthetic spirit which comes natural to the Italian peasant. (Yes, dear Mr. Critic, I mean 'comes natural,' not 'comes naturally.' Think it over for yourself, and you will see that I am right, and that your superfine objection is positively wrong, not merely hypercritical.) But on the morning of the lunch, I was chiefly employed in looking after the dining-room and arranging flowers, for which I had

always a native talent. My harmony in chrysanthemums was a subtle success. Mrs. Mallory was charmed with the simplicity of my decoration. 'It is Japanesque, child,' she said; and though my ideas of the Japanesque were then somewhat hazy, I knew from her tone that she meant it to be taken as the highest commendation, and I flushed with pleasure.

Just before lunch-time, two ladies arrived. They sat in the drawing-room with Mrs. Mallory, while I was still unobtrusively occupied in flitting about the room and settling small details. I wore my Italian costume, which was, as it were, my official uniform—barbaric richness of colour; a frock of orange and scarlet-striped cotton, with a broad scarlet sash knotted about my waist, and a bright-hued neckerchief. The visitors gossiped with my hostess on the sofa. Their talk turned much on the recent doings of Mrs. Mallory's cousin John. John, I could see, was an important person. I gathered from what they let drop that 'poor John' had been sadly treated by an elect lady unnamed, to whom he had been engaged for close on three years. The elect lady had jilted him, and married a guardsman, which term, I suspected from the side-hints they gave, must mean an officer in a cavalry regiment. 'But what could you expect?' Mrs. Mallory murmured, in a deprecatory voice. 'John is a capital fellow, we all know, and as good as gold; but he is the prince of prigs. What high-spirited girl could ever put up with him when she came to know him—really to know him?'

'He has money?' one of the ladies asked.

'Not quite what one calls *money* nowadays, but enough to live on—a comfortable competency, and a good post under government. His future is certain —*and* splendid.'

'Still, he has been unfortunate in all his love-affairs.'

'Yes. This, you know, is his second disappointment. She kept on putting the marriage off from month to month on one pretext after another, shilly-shallying, toying with him, till at last she wrote that she did not care for him, and *did* care for the guardsman.'

'It must have been a terrible blow to your cousin's *amour propre*!'

'It was—poor John! A cavalry officer above all! And John, who prides himself on his intellectual qualities!'

'But at the present day, dear Mrs. Mallory—there are so many girls, you know—and so few eligible men. A man who can marry is quite the exception. He ought to suit himself. A Girton girl, now—surely he might find some satisfactory Girton girl. Many of them, one would think, must be perfectly prig-proof.'

'Oh no; I fancy not. A Girton girl would be the worst possible choice. When prig meets prig, then comes the tug of war.'

The other lady spoke: her tone was acid. 'For my part,' she said, nursing her long tortoise-shell glasses, 'I have no patience with the woman. I

have advised him to choose some nice bright lassie —catching her young, you know, and plastic—and to educate her up——'

'Rosalba,' Mrs. Mallory interposed, 'we've forgotten one thing! Run out to the kitchen, quick, there's a good girl, and bring me a jug of cold water to put with those cactus-dahlias!'

I was sorry to be sent away just then, for I was interested in John; but I ran as I was bid. By the time I came back with the jug of water, they were all three whispering. A minute later, Sir Hugh Tachbrook arrived, and turned the conversation.

Next instant, the drawing-room door opened again, and the housemaid announced 'Mr. John Stodmarsh.'

He entered with a slow tread, as of a man who recognises his own weight and worth. His Future weighed upon him. In his hand he held a glossy-black silk hat. I recognised him at once. Eyes set far apart: thin lips: keen solid features: he was my old friend of the Madonna del Monte.

'I'm not late, Linda, I hope,' he said, in a precise and cultivated voice, a trifle thin and colourless, advancing to Mrs. Mallory, and kissing her with a perfunctory cousinly kiss. 'I was detained at the office—you know what official slavery is like—important dispatches.'

'On the contrary, you are early, John,' Mrs. Mallory answered, in a constrained tone; and I noted that his arrival seemed to cast a reflected air of stiffness over the entire meeting.

He shook hands in a courtly, old-fashioned way with the two other ladies; then his eye lighted on me. I wondered if he would recognise me, but he did not. 'Twas not likely he would. However, he looked hard at me and seemed to be interested. Instinctively I felt that he thought me pretty.

'One of your models?' he asked, raising his eyebrows, but dropping his voice as though the existence of models were scarcely proper.

Mrs. Mallory nodded assent. 'But more than a model,' she added, with her subtle smile.

'So I should think,' he replied, and regarded me with a fixed stare, not impolitely.

Other guests arrived. I flitted about the room, vaguely aware that Mrs. Mallory desired to keep me in evidence. Now and then she called me on some frivolous pretext. She and John Stodmarsh talked much to one another, and then looked at me. I felt sure they were talking about me. Though he had grown a little older, and was clad now in a tight-fitting frock-coat in place of the grey tourist suit, my old acquaintance was still much the same as ever—close-shaven, clear-cut, sleek, with logical features and a strongly marked chin, but with more of intellect than of emotion in his face—a typical, solid, cultivated Englishman. He held his head erect. His manner bore the stamp of complete confidence in an assured future.

Two or three times before lunch was announced, he lounged over near where I flitted about among the guests and took a hard look at me. He seemed

as if he were scheduling me. Each time he went back and spoke once more to Mrs. Mallory, with his thumbs stuck in the armholes of his waistcoat. I caught a phrase now and again—'Might be moulded into any shape one desired': 'Extremely attractive, Linda': 'Great native ability, John': 'Different with those Italians': 'Well, the south, you know, is never naturally vulgar.'

But Sir Hugh muttered only two words, 'Young guttersnipe!'

By and by they all went in to lunch. I loitered behind in the drawing-room with a strange sense of impending revolution. My ears burned and tingled. I do not know whether it was because in the dining-room they were talking of me.

At any rate, I flung myself back on the sofa, and closed my eyes. I began to reflect that life was wonderful, and that I had seen a great deal of it.

Presently, almost before they were all seated, Mrs. Mallory came out to me, closely followed by John Stodmarsh. 'Rosalba,' she said in an abrupt voice, 'Mr. Stodmarsh invites you to come in and lunch with us.'

'I—I don't want to go,' I answered, taken aback. If Mrs. Mallory had never erected the barrier, I would have taken all my meals with her as a matter of course: as she had not asked me from the first, I did not care to be dragged in now by special favour.

'But you've got to come. You know, you promised to obey me in everything reasonable.'

'Is it so nominated in the bond?' I answered, rising.

John Stodmarsh started. 'Why, where did you get that from, child?' he asked quickly.

'It is in Shakespeare,' I answered. 'Don't you remember, Shylock says it to Portia when she urges him to mercy?'

His round eyes of wonder amused me. 'Then—you have read Shakespeare?' he murmured.

I smiled. 'Why not? Hath not an Italian eyes? Hath not an Italian hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you give us the chance, will we not read Shakespeare?'

He glanced across at Mrs. Mallory. 'And hath not an Italian originality?' he exclaimed in an undertone.

I curtsied my thanks. 'If I have earned *your* approbation——' I said. 'But I am keeping your lunch waiting.'

They had made a place for me between two guests; I took my seat there, with John Stodmarsh beside me. As I sat down, he beamed round with a smile on the other visitors, and murmured, 'Experimental, purely.' He thought I would not understand what he meant, but I did. Fortunately, however, I was born without *mauvaise honte.* I seated myself as composedly as if I had always dined at the high table. I think it is only English people who feel conscious of sitting below the salt. For myself, in

spite of my adventures and the strange bedfellows they had forced upon me, I never lost the ingrained sense of nobility natural to the daughter of a man who had fought for Italy. Sir Hugh glared at me, too appalled for language.

Just at first, the rest of the company abstained from talking much to me, or even from obtrusively watching me; though I was dimly aware that they cast alarmed side-glances in my direction from time to time, no doubt because they suspected me of impossible evolutions with my knife and fork; they were clearly on the lookout for the wildest social solecisms. Their attitude only put me more at my ease. It would never occur to an Italian peasant that his 'table manners' (as English servants say) were less than fit for the banquets of princes. I ate my smelt *au gratin* and my mutton cutlet in unembarrassed silence. My perfect *sang-froid* relieved the tension. By the time we had arrived at the grouse, Mrs. Mallory and her friends had realised the fact that I was not a savage.

Then I began to talk. In five minutes the whole table was listening with amusement. Even John Stodmarsh, who would have made an impressive judge, laughed at my sallies. He left off laying down the law on our relations with France, and paused to hear me.

Phebe, the parlour-maid, offered me trifle. I helped myself to a little, conscious that she offered it with a very bad grace; it hurt Phebe's feelings as a self-respecting, high-class English servant to wait

at table where an Italian model was seated among the gentry. Mrs. Mallory glanced at me as I began to eat it. 'That's sudden death, Rosalba,' she murmured in a tone of warning.

'Then I shall know the worst,' I answered, swallowing a spoonful composedly.

'Come back and tell us,' John Stodmarsh put in. 'It is the great fault of travellers who visit that bourne that they never return to let us know what they think of it.'

'Dante did,' I answered. 'He gave us a perfect guide-book to the Other World. But then, his account is not exactly encouraging.'

'The *Inferno*, no; but have you read the *Paradiso*?'

'Oh, I don't care for the *Paradiso*. It is all too vague. I should want a heaven more like this earth —a heaven where things are warmer and more human: a heaven, don't you know, with grouse and trifle in it.'

'My dear Rosalba,' Mrs. Mallory exclaimed, 'how terribly unpoetical! Grouse and trifle! My child, you are too earthy. If you hold such opinions, you should *not* give vent to them.'

'I always say what I think,' I answered. 'That's my charm, Mrs. Mallory. Besides, of course, there are heavens and heavens. In the heaven in the *Arabian Nights*, if you are a good Moslem, you have Abyssinian slaves and houris to wait upon you, and all sorts of good things, just the same as on earth here. I believe there must be different brands of

heaven for different types of races and temperaments. I should want *my* heaven where there were plenty of roses, and peaches on the wall, and lovely grounds with flowery promontories of lilac and laburnum, to walk up and down in, just like Sir Hugh's, or the gardens about Aladdin's palace.'

John Stodmarsh turned to our hostess and exclaimed in French, with a very English accent, and some English idiom, 'Elle sait beaucoup, cette enfant. Où donc l'a-t-elle ramassé?'

'Sur la grand' route, monsieur,' I answered, bobbing at him. 'On y ramasse bien de choses, quand on est bon chiffonnier.'

'Mais—vous parlez français aussi?' he cried, more and more astonished.

'Mais naturellement,' I answered. 'Did I not give dramatic representations in France—*à la belle étoile*—for more than a twelvemonth?'

He glanced at Mrs. Mallory. She glanced at him. His glance said, 'She is extraordinary.' Her glance said, 'I told you so.' Then he spoke aloud. 'She will do,' he said slowly.

'For what?' I asked.

'For me,' he answered.

It struck me long after as characteristically mannish that he should say so glibly, 'She will do for me,' without waiting to ask himself, 'Shall I do for her?'—a question which men in their lordly fashion seldom seem to hit upon.

The parlour-maid offered me wine. 'No, thanks, Phebe!' I said, laying one finger across my glass.

'You may take a little, Rosalba,' Mrs. Mallory put in. 'It is hock—very light.'

'I never take it,' I answered firmly.

'Prejudice?' Sir Hugh asked, relenting.

'Oh no,' I replied; 'but—I have seen the evil of it.'

They all burst out laughing. I was put on my mettle. 'Oh, if you think me prejudiced,' I went on, 'I'll take half a glass to show my open mind.—The nectar, Hebe! I mean, Phebe!'

There was a moment's pause; then John Stodmarsh spoke again. 'Where did you learn all these things?' he asked abruptly.

I poised an olive on the end of my fork and answered laughing, 'At the university of Salamanca.'

'Salamanca? Then you have been in Spain too?'

'Is Salamanca in Spain?' I asked innocently. 'Well, I never knew that. I thought, like Bagdad, it was nowhere in particular. How odd it should be in Spain—*où j'ai tant de châteaux!*'

Their eyes met again. They were trying to examine me.

'This is very extraordinary, Linda,' he went on, half-aside. 'English girls who have been to good schools know absolutely nothing. Why, there is my niece Phyllis—from Miss Buss's, at Hampstead—I spoke to her the other day of the *Gerusalemme* and the *Orlando Furioso*, and I assure you, she had never even heard of Tasso or Ariosto.'

'Mauvaise éducation!' I murmured, half below my breath. 'La ville—les pensionnats! But, in the

open air, on the highroads — with nature all round one——' and I ate my olive.

John Stodmarsh surveyed me once more with a curious amused smile playing round the corners of his *doctrinaire* mouth. 'There may be some truth in that,' he drawled out slowly; 'at any rate, you appear to justify your doctrine in your own person. But don't you think it would do a scholar educated in that open-air university of which you speak a certain amount of good to take a course of lessons in some more regular school—to get the ordinary scholastic training superadded to her peculiar line of knowledge?'

'Oh, it might finish her education, no doubt,' I answered, off-hand. 'Though, for my own part, I would rather learn in the fields and on the hills than stew in a schoolroom.'

'Each has its use,' John Stodmarsh mused oracularly.

'No doubt,' I replied, and helped myself to an apricot.

CHAPTER XII

SIGNED, SEALED, AND DELIVERED

AFTER lunch we adjourned to the room in Bond Street where the exhibition was to be held. I flitted about the place as usual, dancing here, dancing there, and putting last touches to the show; while Mrs. Mallory and her friends inspected the pictures. Some of them held their heads judicially on one side, a little way off: others peered close into the canvas with critical eye-glasses. From time to time I caught fragments of their modulated murmur. I have terrible ears, and terribly quick perceptions. All through life I have overheard much that was not meant for me. Through the Babel of sounds now, stray sentences detached themselves. Half of them, of course, were about the pictures—the usual would-be connoisseurish and laudatory talk of those who have learnt the art of simulating conversation. But the other half was not. It concerned a person, described as 'She': I thought I could conjecture about whom they were speaking.

'The Godiva is charming.' 'High lights on the shoulders overdone, perhaps.' 'But don't you think the horse's off leg——' 'Has the manners of a lady.'

'Just a touch more blue, I fancy.' 'Not green enough, is it?' 'Could hardly believe it; why, Mrs. Mallory says she was wandering about the roads——' 'That exquisite bit of landscape.' 'The figures are all right, but the trees—my dear, how unspeakable!' 'A trifle too pink.' 'Between ourselves, I call it out of drawing.' 'Bowled John Stodmarsh over; I never saw a man so completely floored——' 'But then, nobody can render trees like *you*, Mrs. Mallory.' 'My dear Linda, it's quite the finest bit of figure-painting you've done since——' 'So quaint! so gipsy-like!' 'Pique, I should say!' 'No, not pique. It often happens so. You see, a man has been living in a strained emotional state, indulging his love-instinct; and all at once his hopes and expectations are frustrated. What more natural for him than to transfer to a new object the flow of feelings which have hitherto——' 'Such splendour of colour! Such wealth of imagination!' 'As clever as she can hold.' 'Too grey; quite too grey—especially in the foreground!' 'But then, consider the antecedents. For my part, I should be afraid——' 'A certain originality of speech and manner.' 'Oh, naturally well-bred; with training, you know, and education——' 'Plastic, so plastic!' 'And he means to educate her.'

I half-guessed what it all meant; but I flitted about between the easels pretending to look unconscious.

In the afternoon, when all the rest had gone, John Stodmarsh remained. 'It is kind of you, Linda,' he said, with his back to the fire and his hands behind

him, 'to undertake the arrangement of this little busi- for me. Let me see'—he pulled out his watch: an ancestral gold watch, with big seals attached—'just four! At half-past I have an important appointment with Sir Everard at the office, and one must not keep a Secretary of State waiting. A hansom will whisk me there in five minutes. That leaves twenty-five—which ought to be ample. I like to strike while the iron is hot. As psychologist I have observed that the apt emotional moment recurs infrequently.'

'Rosalba,' Mrs. Mallory said, with a tinge of gentle hesitation in her voice, 'come with me into the back room here.'

I followed her, more than half-aware what was the nature of the 'little business' she was about to propose to me.

She seated me by her side on the sofa and took my hands in her own, as she was fond of doing. I think since the barrier prevented her from kissing me, she liked to make use of the only other outlet permitted for her feelings. She looked lovely in her loose pale-rose-spotted tea-gown. 'My dear child,' she began, in a constrained tone, 'it has struck me more than once since you came to me that I have a duty to perform to you.'

'Not at all, dear Mrs. Mallory!' I answered, nestling towards her with a vague premonition of her meaning. 'I dropped from the clouds upon you, a mere waif and stray: you have been kind and good to me; but you owe me no duty.'

She demurred. 'Still, you have been of use to me too, my child. You have made my picture.'

'Oh yes, I know that,' I replied, with a certain tightening of the muscles of the throat. 'If I had not been of use, how could I have consented to remain with you?' And I rubbed myself against her with a cat-like sense of pleasure in the mere proximity.

She pressed my hand harder and gazed into my swimming eyes with a curious surprise. 'What an odd little thing you are!' she cried. 'I never can make out where you got all these feelings.'

'I fancy feelings are mostly born in one.'

'I believe they must be. But, Rosalba, this is what Mr. Stodmarsh . . . and I . . . want to speak to you about. Has it ever occurred to you that you cannot always be a model?'

'My dear Mrs. Mallory, what a question to ask a butterfly! 'Tis like the ant and the grasshopper in the fable. I am a grasshopper, *voyez-vous, sauterelle, sauterelle*—flitting here, flitting there—a touch, and *pouf, je saute.* I make it a religion to take no heed for the morrow.'

Mrs. Mallory looked grave. She was not born in Bohemia. 'All the more reason, then, dear, why I should take heed for it on your account. You are growing towards womanhood, my child, and you are much, very much too old for your years. Moreover, you are clever. Does it ever strike you that perhaps you have genius?'

'I can't say it does,' I answered, stroking her soft hand; 'but I know I can make up little plays and am a good mimic.'

'Now, what do you think you will do when you grow up to be a woman?'

'Go on the stage, I suppose,' I announced in haste: 'or else write books; or else . . . marry somebody. Quite the proper number of things, you see—three courses open to me.'

'Rosalba, *can't* you be serious a minute?'

I started. 'Dear Mrs. Mallory, don't look at me like that with those reproachful eyes, or I shall burst out crying. I am appallingly serious. I—well, I try to be flippant so as to keep my heart up.'

She looked again into my eyes and saw it was true. I was holding back my tears with a violent effort.

'Go on the stage; no': she went on, 'with *your* temperament, that would be a pity; I foresee grave dangers for you. Write books; that must be as your development may decide. But the third alternative is, after all, the most probable—marry.'

'It is woman's sphere, they say,' I answered, blinking. I had read that mysterious catchword in the papers.

'Now, whatever happens to you, we have this to consider: you ought, with your abilities, to have a more regular education.'

'I have had the best,' I answered; for on that point I was positive.

'Still, it might be supplemented; and Mr. Stodmarsh desires to supplement it. He has made a proposition to me. He wants you to let him undertake the charge of your education.'

'Send me to school?'

'Yes, send you to school, and make a lady of you.'

I looked up, almost hurt. 'No, no: not that; not *make* a lady: there, again, I believe I was born so.'

Mrs. Mallory sat on the arm of the sofa and bent over me. 'You are right, Rosalba. I spoke hastily. Bring out more clearly the lady within you, I meant. —Do you think you would care to accept his offer?'

I paused and hesitated. My experiences on the road had made me in many ways older than my age. 'It is a big question,' I answered. 'There are so many things to consider. Of course, I have not been brought up like other girls. I don't know whether, after the free life I have led, I could be mewed up in a class-room, could stand the restraints, the iron clamps of a school; and I don't know whether——'

'Whether what?'

I felt my cheeks burn. 'Whether—I could ever—care for Mr. Stodmarsh.'

Mrs. Mallory started. 'What a strange child it is! Then you have guessed what he means, Rosalba?'

'I am not a fool, dear Mrs. Mallory. Partly guessed it: partly overheard various scraps of conversation. My ears are too quick. And you yourself said, "The third alternative is the most probable—marry."'

She smoothed my hair with her hands. 'You are right, my dear child. He wants you to—to care for him.'

'Of course,' I answered. 'If it were not for that, how could I consider his proposal? He would not want to educate me except for some good reason; I

must be able to make him some return for his kindness. The question is—suppose, when I grow older, I don't desire to marry him?'

She seized my arm, half-frightened. 'Rosalba,' she said, drawing my head towards her lap, 'you are alarmingly wise for your years. I daren't even tell John Stodmarsh how fully you understand and enter into his plan. He would be shocked at your understanding it. But since you *do* understand, you are quite right in considering this question. Now, my dear child, I want to speak earnestly to you. You have great gifts, and I think they should be cultivated. You have great abilities, and I think they should be developed. John Stodmarsh is a most honourable and excellent man, much respected by all who know him——'

'So much so that they call him the prince of prigs,' I murmured half-inaudibly.

She held her breath, a little distressed. I repented me of my saying. 'But I can see he is a gentleman, and an able man, and one who would always do what was right,' I added.

'He is. And what you have to ask yourself is this: do you think you could undertake, if he sent you to school, to work hard and try to fit yourself for the position in life——'

'To which he might be pleased to promote me? Like the Grand Sultan with a favourite slave.—Well, I will think about it, dear lady!'

She pursed her mouth at me wistfully. A kiss trembled there, irresolute. I could see she was

deeply anxious to do what she judged to be for my best. After all, I was very young. I tried to think for myself, but it is difficult for a girl, before the Great Awakening has come upon her, to realise what such an engagement means. I buried my face in Mrs. Mallory's sleeve. 'Do *you* wish it?' I asked, trembling.

'If you can promise it without wronging yourself. It is such a rare chance in life for you.'

I flung myself upon her. 'You dear!' I cried, 'I can't bear to go away from you. But if *you* wish it —why, to please you, I would marry twenty John Stodmarshes.'

She seemed somehow to feel that the bare acceptance of that hypothetical position broke down the barrier; for all at once, with a sudden yielding, she clasped me to her bosom, and for the first time kissed me.

'I had never a daughter, dear,' she whispered. 'Now, you shall be a daughter to me.'

I was very happy because Mrs. Mallory had kissed me. I think at the time that episode counted for much more with me than John Stodmarsh's offer.

She paused awhile, letting her hand lie in mine. 'And if you should find,' she went on, 'when you are older, and better able to judge of these things, that you cannot give John Stodmarsh your heart, I am sure he is too good and too honourable a man to insist upon your accepting him.'

'Dear signora!' I cried, 'a bargain is a bargain. If he educates me, it is with a particular condition.

If I accept the education, I accept the condition. I have considered the matter, and I promise to take him. Suppose you wish me to go to school, to school I go at once, even though it means that I must go away from *you*. But—I may come and be painted in my holidays, mayn't I?'

'You may!' she cried, clasping one arm around me. 'Rosalba, you have twined your tendrils somehow round my heart: I shall want to be painting you always.'

She led me to the door. Her suavities of outline as she moved were lovely. 'John,' she said, entering the other room, 'Rosalba consents.'

He laid down a book he had taken out of the little black bag he always carried—I looked at it afterwards, and saw it was *Poor-Law Reform*—with a somewhat distracted air. 'Oh, does she?' he said at last, nursing his left knee. 'Well, I am glad of that. —Rosalba, I wish you to consider me henceforth as your guardian.—I will discuss the question of a suitable school with you to-morrow, Linda. Meanwhile, perhaps you will oblige me by getting this child civilised garments, will you? Nothing too fine, you know; simple, lady-like English garments. Without pretending to be an expert in ladies' costume, I would venture to suggest as a basis grey cashmere—I think it is called cashmere—a sort of soft, drabby, self-coloured woollen material. You understand my wishes?'

Mrs. Mallory demurred. 'Oh, John, grey cashmere would not suit her complexion at all. It would

simply crush her. Fancy that deep brown skin and those big dark eyes buried in grey cashmere! She *must* have a touch of scarlet. Leave that to me. It is positively necessary.'

'I bow submission to your artistic opinion. A touch of scarlet if you will; a very modest small touch of scarlet; just as much as you think absolutely indispensable to suit her colouring. You are a judge of these things. But take my grey as the keynote. You catch at what I mean? A sort of modified quakerdom.—She will suit very well, Linda; very well, indeed': this half-aside. 'She has wit, sprightliness, *verve*, originality. With a little education—dear me, I have only just time to get down to Whitehall.—Good morning, Linda.' A perfunctory kiss again. 'Good morning, Rosalba.' I thought he was going to kiss me too; but he changed his mind, and held his hand out. 'I will see you again to-morrow, when we can arrange everything.'

And, with a courtly bow, he was off to his hansom.

CHAPTER XIII

CLIPPING MY WINGS

IT is certain that Miss Westmacott's High School at Provost Road, South Hampstead, was a typically British institution. Just consider its Britannicisms —its flagrant Britannicity. In the first place, it described itself as a 'High School for Young Ladies.' That was a beautiful compromise! There are High Schools for Girls which have achieved success; and success in England means many imitators. But Miss Westmacott's school added to the imitative title the truly British variant (so rich in snobbery) 'for Young Ladies.' Parents who might have hesitated to entrust their Ethel and their Gwendoline to a High School for mere Girls could safely confide them to Miss Westmacott's teaching in an atmosphere breathed only by Young Ladies. Then, again, in the self-same spirit, it spoke of Provost Road as in South Hampstead. That is another sweet touch! A feeling exists that Hampstead is 'cultivated,' Hampstead is quietly gentlemanly; so, if you live within a mile and a-half of anything that can by any stretch of courtesy be reckoned as Hampstead, you allude to

your street as being in 'South Hampstead,' or 'East Hampstead,' or 'North Hampstead,' or 'Hampstead Valley.' All these little touches were characteristic of Miss Westmacott's type. The keynote of her establishment was its selectness, its exclusiveness, its high lady-like tone—in one word, its snobbishness.

I never felt myself adapted for Miss Westmacott's.

My guardian—that was how I was to describe John Stodmarsh in future—conveyed me there in person, after Mrs. Mallory had transformed my outer woman from an Italian model to a model English girl—I mean Young Lady. We descended at the door, boxes and all. A prim housemaid ushered us into a prim parlour.

After a decent interval, during which I sat trembling on the edge of my chair, Miss Westmacott entered. For the first time in my life, I felt really frightened. I knew my troubles were about to begin. Born and bred in Bohemia, I shivered to find myself on the coasts of the Philistines.

I raised my eyes and looked at her. Miss Westmacott was an anachronism in a crimped cap and pepper-and-salt ringlets. Her face was not long, however, but round and sleek, and eminently placid. A faint moustache fringed her upper lip. Her under lip protruded like a camel's. The nose was feebly Roman. She wore a settled smile of professional amiability. It was the smile begotten of the long practice of interviewing the parent. Like the rain from heaven, it fell on all alike. Her figure was not exactly stout, but massive. I saw at once how John

Stodmarsh had selected Her Imperturbability as the director of my education. Knowing me to be a wild and wayward little Italian vagabond, he wished to mitigate my native exuberance by placing me with a lady of reposeful manners and of unblemished respectability. And he succeeded. Her primness was supernatural. I do not know the secret of Miss Westmacott's antecedents, but I have always suspected that she must have been the outcome of an early indiscretion on the part of Miss Mangnall with Mr. Pinnock. It dawned on me soon that Miss Westmacott, indeed, was the last of her class—what modern science calls a Survival. I doubt if there now exists a single schoolmistress like her. I say 'exists,' for though I am not aware whether she is still alive or not, I often fear I must have been the death of Miss Westmacott.

Yet even an anachronism must accommodate itself somehow to the alien century in which it finds itself dumped down. The survival survives, after all, like the rest of us, by adaptation to its environment. That is why Miss Westmacott, essentially a product of the Georgian age, called her establishment a High School instead of an Academy; and that is why we learned Latin and Algebra and other masculine subjects which Her Imperturbability in her heart of hearts despised as 'unwomanly.' She regretted samplers. But here I anticipate.

Miss Westmacott put her folding eye-glasses on the bridge of her feebly Roman nose, and regarded me with a fixed, though amiable stare, as if I [illegible] a

botanical specimen. I squirmed a little as I stood, in order to suggest the fact that I belonged in reality to the animal kingdom. Her face was mildly critical. 'So *this* is your ward, Mr. Stodmarsh?' she began with her vapid smile, after a long inspection. 'Well —I am glad to receive her.'

She said, 'I am glad to receive her'; but her stare and the intonation of her voice implied, 'After all, there is nothing so *very* outrageous about her!' I knew from her air that John Stodmarsh had prepared her mind beforehand for receiving a veritable Italian savage.

'Oh, I can behave like a Christian,' I interposed, smiling.

Miss Westmacott eyed me with massive serenity. 'I am glad of that,' she replied, in a very deliberate voice, her under lip positively drooping; 'for I feared, Mr. Stodmarsh, from what you told me of your own opinions, that your ward——'

'But you understand that she is to receive no religious instruction whatever?' my guardian broke in. I learned later that he called himself an Agnostic, which seems to mean a man who professes to know nothing about the constitution of the universe, but to know it a great deal more firmly and dogmatically than other people.

Miss Westmacott smoothed out the folds of her black dress—she lived in a chronic condition of mitigated mourning—and answered in a voice of deprecatory acquiescence, 'Oh, certainly, if you desire it, your ward shall be exempted from our

usual round of religious lessons; though, naturally, in the course of our ordinary teaching——'

'I don't mind that,' John Stodmarsh interrupted, much to her discomposure—for she was unused to interruption—'I only wish that she should enjoy complete religious freedom. She was brought up a Catholic——'

'And is even a Catholic still,' I interposed briskly. I did not wish to abjure my birthright for a mess of pottage without being even consulted.

My guardian took no notice of my interruption, but went on gravely: 'Nevertheless, I desire to afford her every opportunity for modifying her beliefs as circumstances may dictate. No doubt as she finds herself more adequately educated, her ideas will broaden.'

'Into accordance with the doctrines of the Church of England,' Miss Westmacott suggested.

I saw it was likely to become a triangular duel, so I refrained from intervening further. The space between Miss Westmacott's eyes was narrow. So were her views. I allowed John Stodmarsh and Her Imperturbability to fight it out between them over my prostrate Papist body.

The girls at Miss Westmacott's—I mean the Select Young Ladies—were a little afraid of me just at first; they feared my outlandish name, my foreign ways, my strange manners. I gesticulated too much to please them. Besides, they questioned me, with the careless ease of youth, about my previous life. I had

a Past: and, as I am by nature a frank creature, I told them the whole truth of it—the road, the One-eyed Calender, the First Murderer, and all the rest. This frightened them not a little. Select Young Ladies are unaccustomed to associate with reclaimed vagrants. In time, however, it was noised abroad in the schoolroom that the Brownie, as they called me, could play plays and tell stories. I had insisted on bringing my Italian costume and my theatrical puppets in my box—I cherished a real affection for Juliet and Miranda; and when the girls learnt this, they declared with one accord that the Brownie must show them how she did it. I was willing enough; throughout my life, indeed, I have never been accused of backwardness in displaying my poor little accomplishments. So one evening, about a week after my enrolment in the list of Select Young Ladies, I took out my Italian dress, slipped my dolls into their robes, assumed my most fascinating professional smile, and began my version of *Romeo and Juliet.*

Never in my life did I make such a dramatic success—at least, never again till I called on Mr. Burminster. Many of the girls crowded round and listened with open eyes: 'it was just like the theatre.' The more they applauded, the more vigorously I acted, and the more desperately I made love in the person of Romeo. An armchair with a table-cover typified the balcony; I set doll Romeo below, and myself leaned over, impassioned, as Juliet to answer him. With my hand pressed hard on my heart,

Italian-wise, as if to still its throbbings, I discoursed of love in abbreviated Shakespeare. The girls listened, spell-bound. Their interest charmed me. I never before played to such a cultivated audience. Ethel Moriarty declared aloud it was 'heavenly.'

I had just uttered the words—

> 'Thou know'st the mask of night is on my face ;
> Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
> For that which thou hast heard me speak to-night'—

when the door opened, and Miss Westmacott sailed in.

There was a sound of scurrying. All the other girls sprang back to their seats with awestruck countenances. But I, being a confirmed rebel, kept my state in my armchair balcony, and declaimed my speech to the end, as if unconscious of my superior's presence. Miss Westmacott drew herself up, let her chin drop, and gazed at me severely. I have intimated that she was a placid person, and she did not allow my audacity to discompose her. She merely waited till I had finished, her Roman nose becoming more and more Roman, with a massive air of judicial silence. As I reached the words,

> 'Which the dark night hath so discoverèd,'

she confronted me calmly; her under lip was like flabby india-rubber.

'Rosalba,' she said, in a quite unruffled voice, which, nevertheless, somehow conveyed the impression of the sternest disapprobation, 'where did you get that fancy dress?'

'It isn't a fancy dress, Miss Westmacott,' I answered. 'It's my Italian clothes; the beauteous scarf veiling an Indian beauty. I always wore these things when I was touring.'

'And those dolls?' she continued, raising Romeo by one leg, and holding him out gingerly upside down, between finger and thumb, by his toes, as if she expected him to bite her.

'He doesn't sting,' I interposed. 'He's not a scorpion. Those are my *dramatis personæ*. I always use them when I give entertainments. I was giving one now. Thou overheardst, ere I was ware, my true love's passion.'

Miss Westmacott never lost her temper. That was partly temperament, partly acquired habit of self-repression. She eyed me with a large and compassionate disapprobation. I was but a poor Foreigner! 'Go to your own room,' she said, in the same slow measured tone as ever, 'and take off these . . . these garments. Really, your appearance is quite extraordinary. Also, remove these toys'—she pointed with her ruler to Mercutio, who lay huddled in a heap on the ground—'and lock them up in your box again. As soon as you are clothed and in your right mind, come to me in the drawing-room.'

I think from their faces the other girls thought Miss Westmacott meant to flay me alive, like St. Bartholomew. But when I went to the drawing-room, I found her just largely and compassionately reproachful. Allowances must be made for benighted Foreigners. She knitted at a loose white woollen

shawl while she spoke to me—a deliberate little device, the solemn effect of which I did not fail to notice. Her bone needles went click, click, click together, to point each sentence.

'Your guardian has placed you here, Rosalba, not merely in order that you may *learn*'—click, click, click—'but also that you may enjoy the advantage of association with *English ladies*.' She laid a stress on the last two words which seemed designed to impress upon me the double fact that I had not the good fortune to be born English, and that I was not a lady. I believe I admire English ladies as amply as they deserve; but I could never see that they differed wholly in kind from other ladies elsewhere. However, I bowed submission. 'You have had great early disadvantages, which we regret and for which we pity you: but your guardian wishes to give you the opportunity'—click, click, click—'for repairing them. I should have thought'—this with a gentle mixture of massive severity and persuasive suggestiveness—'that your own good taste and good sense (for I know you have intelligence), would have deterred you'—click, click, click—'from alluding before your fellow-pupils—young ladies from cultivated English homes—to your unfortunate childhood and your wild foreign experiences.' She put an accent on the word *foreign* which showed she regarded it as practically synonymous with *disreputable*. 'I should have thought you would have taken care to conceal from them these unhappy episodes in your past. You have not done so. I must ask you now, for your

own sake, and in justice to your guardian, as well as for the sake of the other girls confided to me, not to repeat these undesirable performances. Will you promise me never again, while you remain here, to wear that—that garb, or to produce those——'

She paused for a word, so I suggested 'Fantoccini.'

'Those objectionable puppets?'

I hesitated. 'I don't want to promise,' I answered.

'Why not?' Click, click, click very clearly.

'Because—if I promise, I shall keep my word. And I don't want to leave off my performances altogether.'

The unexpected answer was counted to me for righteousness. Miss Westmacott paused in her knitting and regarded me for a moment with mollified eyes. 'Mr. Stodmarsh and Mrs. Mallory would wish it,' she said at last in her massive way.

My colour deepened. She had applied judicial torture. 'If Mrs. Mallory wishes it—I promise,' I answered.

She looked me through and through in her calm, well-bred way. 'That will do,' she murmured. 'You can go back now to the other girls. I accept your promise. Rosalba, I *trust* you.'

I felt that was harder than if she had scolded and punished me.

But from that day forth, I was an immense favourite with the other girls. Though I was not allowed to produce my puppets, or wear my native dress, I gave my little plays and told my stories without

them. And my vivid southern manner delighted my audience. What to an Italian child came by nature as mere spontaneous gesture seemed to my English schoolfellows the most intense and exciting dramatic action. The Brownie was thenceforth on the best of terms with them.

CHAPTER XIV

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

'How about lessons?' you ask. Oh, lessons gave me very little trouble.

You see, I had so long been unused to learning that school came to me as a novelty: I plied my book diligently; for I went to subjects fresh, where to the other girls they were stale and hackneyed. Besides, the languages caused me no difficulty. I had French and Italian by ear already; and with their aid I found Latin easy; indeed, I had spelt it out a little when I went to church, for I could follow a great deal of the prayer-book by guess-work. Arithmetic I hated: there is nothing picturesque in arithmetic: but I circumvented it. As for history and geography, well—they were so interesting! It was funny to find out that Julius Cæsar was a real person, and that Bagdad was not an airy nothing in Fairyland, but a town on the Tigris! I was constantly making such fresh discoveries, which delighted me in the same way as it delighted King George's minister to learn that Cape Breton was an island. If M. Jourdain was charmed to hear he had been

talking prose all his life without knowing it, I was equally charmed to hear that I had been drinking in history and geography when I supposed myself to be reading poetic fancies by Shakespeare and Dante. Virgil, it seemed, was an actual poet, not a myth of the *Inferno*; and Pisa and Bruges were actual cities!

'Naturally quick, but undisciplined,' was Miss Westmacott's favourite report. 'Takes pains where she is interested, and none where she is not.' It shocked Her Imperturbability when I tore open my first report—addressed to 'John Stodmarsh, Esq.'—before her very eyes, and made the audible comment upon it, 'No profit comes where is no pleasure ta'en; in short, sir, study what you most affect.' 'That child,' she said in her slow way to my natural enemy, the mathematical mistress, 'has read more than is good for her.'

When John spoke to me once in the garden of the need for learning mathematics (which I hated), I tried to be submissive.

'You must think of your after life,' he said.

'We must not sacrifice the present to the future,' I answered sweetly. 'It is too often done.'

He looked at me with an odd look. 'You mean, the future to the present,' he said, puzzled.

'Oh no: that would be platitude,' I cried; 'and I am never a platitudinarian. So many people forget that the present is all we have; the future'—I blew a dandelion-clock—'it may go *pop*, like that! *I* try to remember our duty to the present.'

He did not quite understand, but he smiled pleasantly.

Sundays I was often allowed, by my guardian's leave, to spend at Mrs. Mallory's. In winter, she was at her flat in town; in summer, at Patchingham. One Saturday afternoon, in my first term, I went to stop with her in her London home; and the moment I arrived I tore upstairs, as was my wont, to slip off my horrid, insipid English clothes, and resume my beloved Italian costume. It was so much warmer in colour; it gratified my barbaric taste for bright hues; item, it suited my complexion and my cast of features better. As soon as I had changed, and was fit to look at, I darted out into the studio, where my beloved Mrs. Mallory was never tired of making little sketches of me.

She was standing at her easel, the dear thing, adding delicate and almost imperceptible little strokes to the polished surface of a marble floor in her foreground. Her brush touched the canvas as if it were thistledown. But she was not alone. A young man in a brown Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers leant his elbows on a pedestal at her side, criticising or admiring her dainty brush-work. The picture represented a dark Roman girl in classical costume, who had flung herself with careless grace on the floor of an atrium, near a bronze statue. 'The reflection is perfect,' the young man said; 'quite perfect; the varying tints in the marble, and in the reflected flesh of the foot on the parti-coloured squares, are as good as they can be made. But . . . just a touch of green

there for local colour, in the shadow between the arch of the instep and the floor . . . what do you think? Dare I venture?'

'Why, Rosalba, my child,' Mrs. Mallory exclaimed, turning round and perceiving me as I stood on tiptoe. 'You're early! How delightful!'

'Miss Westmacott let me go an hour before my time,' I answered, jumping at her. 'It ought to have been Latin; but to-morrow being the First Sunday in Advent, she made it religious instruction instead: and I'm off religion, by my guardian's orders.'

The young man turned too. For a second he stared at me, astonished. Then he advanced, with his right hand extended. 'Have you forgotten me?' he asked, with a bright smile, all his face aglow with it.

John Stodmarsh did not remember me when we met. The man in brown did. That struck a key-note. One likes to be remembered.

'Forgotten you!' I answered, taking his hand like an old friend. 'Not at all! Your name is Arthur Wingham.'

'You don't mean to say you recollect it!'

'Perfectly. I have always remembered you; also Mr. Stodmarsh.'

'So *this* is the girl that Stodmarsh——'

'Has adopted as his ward,' Mrs. Mallory interjected before he could commit himself to anything more precise. 'Yes, this is my Rosalba!'

'He has taken me . . . on approbation,' I put in saucily.

'But he never told me it was *you*,' the man in brown went on, standing off to stare at me.

'He did not know,' I answered. 'I did not quite like to recall to him now that he had seen me before on the Monti Berici.'

'Why not?' he asked curiously.

I hesitated. 'Well, you know, he said Beri'ci,' I answered at last, with some reluctance, 'and I thought'—I pursed my lips—'I thought it might annoy him to feel that I perhaps remembered it. You see, he has such consciousness of his own dignity.'

Arthur Wingham glanced at Mrs. Mallory. 'The young lady possesses tact,' he murmured, 'as well as observation of character.'

'Observation!' Mrs. Mallory answered in the same half-aside. 'A blade of Damascus!'

'But you will not tell Mr. Stodmarsh I have seen him before?' I put in anxiously.

'Tell him? not for worlds,' he answered. I was too young to know then that this was a bad beginning to a friendship, for a girl who was to be John Stodmarsh's wife. Nothing is more dangerous than a secret shared together; a secret shared together, no matter how small, against the man or woman one is meant to marry—well, there can be but one of two ends to it.

'Where did you see her?' Mrs. Mallory asked, laying down her palette and drawing me towards her.

Arthur Wingham told her in brief, in his own way, the story of our first meeting at the Madonna del Monte.

The smell of the wine-vats rose again to my nostrils. It brought tears into my eyes to be thus carried back to home and my Father.

'How odd you should both remember!' Mrs. Mallory exclaimed, seating me on the couch.

He looked down at me once more, and pointed with his left hand demonstratively. 'Not at all,' he answered, moving one finger of his right down through the air in sinuous curves, as if drawing my figure. 'The astonishing point is—that Stodmarsh should have forgotten. But the dear fellow lacks only one thing—a soul. . . . In a Government office, the omission is unimportant.'

'Arthur! You are unjust to him! And besides, he is my cousin.'

'Yes. He *has* that good point.—But you have been at my rooms and looked over my sketches; I wonder that when you saw her first—those elusive eyes, that erratic hair—you did not recollect having seen something like her.'

'She *did* strike me as strangely familiar, but I could not think why. I set it down to her being the type of the ideal Italian—the higher and more ethereal Italian, don't you know, with poetry, feeling, fancy.'

'My dear Mrs. Mallory!' I cried, hiding my blushes in her soft pashmina gown. 'You conspire to spoil me! What would Miss Westmacott say if only she could hear you? It is well that I have her candid opinion constantly turned on like a cold douche, to counteract your flow of flattery.'

'Stop a minute!' Arthur Wingham cried, seizing his crush felt-hat. 'I'll just run round to my rooms, Linda, and see if you can reconstruct something.' And he darted away round the corner to his own studio.

'He is very handsome,' I said, as he disappeared down the corridor. 'How nice of him to remember me!'

'Quite nice.' She coughed a little cough. 'But still, Rosalba dear, he spoke the truth; it is not easy to forget you.'

'Oh, *please*, Mrs. Mallory! Recollect, I am a waif of the highway, unused to gentle treatment.' My eyes were dim again.

'Then you have arrears to make up, dear. I am not afraid of spoiling you. Miss Westmacott will serve to redress the balance.'

In a minute or two Arthur Wingham dashed in again, bearing in his hand a much-worn sketch-book. He opened it at a certain page, and displayed it to Mrs. Mallory. It contained two or three sketches of a tripping little Italian child, half-monkey, half-fairy, clad in an obtrusively national costume, and engaged in the wildest and most impossible gambols. One of the pages he turned over in haste and tried to conceal from me; but I insisted upon seeing it. It showed two children pushing one another, and bore the inscription, 'Naow then, Mariar-Ann, if you do that agin, I shall gao stright in an' tell your mother!"'

'Did I look like that then?' I cried, laughing.

'Yes; you looked like that then,' he answered,

eyeing it sideways and comparing past with present. 'But already, even then, there was a wistfulness in your big eyes, a questioning wonder in your expression, a strange touch of fancy in the twitch of your eager mouth, that I have never forgotten. I have put you since that time in more than one picture from those hasty notes. . . . We do not always find faces, Linda, that look straight through space into the Infinite beyond it.'

'You are not to be alone in spoiling me, it seems, Mrs. Mallory,' I said, growing crimson.

But Mrs. Mallory answered nothing; for she was hurriedly jotting down, on a spare bit of cardboard, the red flush through my brown cheek before it paled and faded.

Arthur Wingham turned once more to my portrait on the easel. 'It is not *quite* right, Linda,' he said, gazing from me to it. 'Not quite magical enough, somehow. A spark more of the gypsy fire in that left eye—dare I?' He scarce touched it with a brush, and suddenly, as if Cinderella's fairy godmother had been at work, a strange light gleamed in the pupil. Mrs. Mallory looked on with a longing delight. 'How is it, Arthur,' she cried, 'that I am a modest success, while you——'

'Are a failure?'

'In popularity—yes; and yet, one stroke——'

He mused and fetched a little sigh. 'It is because *you* paint faultlessly the things that people want, while *I* grope blindly, with fierce graspings and stumblings, after the things people do not care for.'

Arthur Wingham dined at Mrs. Mallory's that Saturday night. He had not been invited, and we had one ptarmigan between us; but I was glad he stopped. He seemed to me there like an old acquaintance. On Sunday morning he came round early, and insisted on escorting me to the Pro-Cathedral. The Mass in G was glorious. When we returned, we found John Stodmarsh awaiting us —close-shaven, immaculate; he lunched, by arrangement, at Mrs. Mallory's every Sunday when I was there. He took my hand with cold politeness and asked where we had been, but seemed vexed when I told him. However, he muttered apologetically to Mrs. Mallory, 'Of course, she will outgrow it.'

'Perhaps,' Mrs. Mallory answered, with a gentle smile. She was the broadest-minded of Anglicans.

'She has too much sense not to see through their rubbish in the long run,' he answered, growing warm. I think John Stodmarsh believed I had too much sense not to conform in the end to all his opinions. Sensible people were those who thought sensibly—as he did.

We had a lovely afternoon in the studio. Mrs. Mallory made me give some of my little dramatic sketches, my parts varying from Miranda to Miss Westmacott. My guardian looked grave at the last impersonation. 'You should not laugh, Linda,' he said, making his collar still more rigid. 'Miss Westmacott is placed in authority over Rosalba. 'Tis a dangerous gift, the gift of mimicry.'

'Dear good Miss Westmacott!' I murmured peni-

tently. 'She has all the virtues—and a Roman nose.'

Meantime Arthur Wingham and Mrs. Mallorymade flying studies of me in my various characters, while John Stodmarsh stood by, his thumbs in his arm-holes, criticising impartially both painters and sitter.

Arthur Wingham was most amusing company. He said many good things, which set us all laughing, and he gave John Stodmarsh sly digs which John hardly perceived, but which kept Mrs. Mallory and me in a constant state of suppressed convulsions. About seven, John left: 'So sorry to go; but I have an appointment to dine'—his voice became impressive, almost awesome—'with the wife of a Cabinet Minister.'

As he closed the door, Arthur Wingham expanded his chest, and made a pantomimic movement of breathing more freely. 'The incubus of prospective greatness is removed,' he muttered.

'Arthur!' Mrs. Mallory put in with a quick glance of warning.

'Yes, I know it is wrong—very wrong,' he answered penitently. He was a creature of moods. 'I ought to say polite and appreciative things about him, of course—especially, I admit, in this present company. But then, our dear friend Stodmarsh is himself so perfectly capable of impressing every one else with a due sense of his own merits that he hardly needs—— Dining with a Cabinet Minister, indeed! Why, he is certain to be in the Cabinet himself before he 's fifty.'

'You must feel it most improper, Wingham,' I began, in John Stodmarsh's own voice and manner, 'to make remarks before this child derogatory to her guardian. Recollect their relation. Jocularity may be ill-timed.'

'Oh, how killingly like him!' Arthur Wingham cried. 'Isn't it, Linda?'

Mrs. Mallory tried to keep her countenance.

'I shall not ask you here again when Rosalba is coming.'

'What a deadly threat! Now you apply thumb-screws. If *that* is to be my penalty——'

'Do talk sense, Mr. Wingham!' I broke in.

'*Mr.* Wingham? Why this mister? Mister me no mystery, if you please, my dear little lady. Are we not old friends? and for auld lang syne's sake shall it not be Arthur?'

'As you like it,' I answered.

'And *your* name is Rosalba.'

'But I did not give you leave to call me by it.'

'No, certainly not. Nor will I. Without Stodmarsh's consent—he is your guardian, you know—I feel I ought not to venture on that liberty.—Besides, I don't like the name Rosalba. It isn't half dainty enough for you.'

'I have no other.'

'Then I shall call you Drusilla—in order not to infringe John Stodmarsh's rights.'

'Why Drusilla?' I asked, wondering.

'Because I like the name; and because, as Dick Swiveller said to the Marchioness, "it is more real

and agreeable." I shall make it Dru for short. Dick Swiveller, after all, was a true idealist. To him, the ideal was more real than the actual. Don't you think he was right, Dru?'

'What nonsense you do talk to the child, Arthur!' Mrs. Mallory put in, moving her foot impatiently.

'Yes; because I am happy. I talk mountains of nonsense whenever I am enjoying myself. This is an old friend, you know, Linda—an old friend often remembered—(who could forget those reticent eyes?)—and another old friend, Horace by name, tells us it is delightful to play the fool with a friend recovered.'

Mrs. Mallory's face grew grave. 'You are following out Horace's prescription to the letter,' she answered, making a mouth at him.

He sobered himself in turn. 'Do you think so?' he answered, changing his tone of a sudden. 'Well, I am sorry for that; for there are persons and subjects it is sacrilege to trifle with.'

CHAPTER XV

I TAKE TO AUTHORSHIP

I SPENT three years at Miss Westmacott's.

The events of those three years I cannot 'reduce to chronological order' (as John Stodmarsh would say) quite so well as those of my early wanderings. They were so monotonous, you see, and had so much less plot-interest! I learned many things; I 'toned down,' Miss Westmacott said—alas, too truly! and I acquired the English passion for the bath. But that was all. My *life* was at a standstill. So I shall only try to recall a few stray episodes.

My guardian was generous to me. I cannot speak too highly of his kindness. He allowed me ample pocket-money. Most of my holidays I spent at Mrs. Mallory's cottage in the country. While there, I saw much of Sir Hugh Tachbrook, who cherished an unrequited affection for my dear Auntie, as I had learned to call her: much, too, of my guardian . . . and something of Arthur Wingham.

When I was about sixteen, a birthday present arrived for me. I phrase it thus dubiously, 'about sixteen,' not as a concession to my Mother's Irish

blood, but because I did not really know my own birthday. We take small count of birthdays in Italy, thinking more of our *festa*, which is the day of our patron saint; but, as I found it advantageous to have a birthday in England, like other people, I adopted for the purpose the 1st of August. It fell conveniently in the middle of the summer holidays, when I was with Mrs. Mallory, and near Sir Hugh, who disapproved of me on principle (as an Italian upstart raised above the position which Providence designed), but for my Auntie's sake always gave me a present. The particular object in question just now, however, did not come from Sir Hugh. A railway van conveyed it. I rushed down to the door, when Ellen informed me of this great event, and to my utter joy beheld—a bicycle!

I screamed with delight. John, who was behind me—I called him simply John now, by request—looked his mild displeasure; he did not wholly approve of women bicycling (political economy demarcates the spheres of the sexes); but he did not forbid it. 'She is a high-spirited girl,' he said aside to Auntie, 'and I suppose she must do as other high-spirited girls do nowadays; though 'tis certainly *not* the gift *I* should have selected for her by preference.'

Auntie shook her head at him and answered very low, 'John, don't be ridiculous!'

I turned to the label. 'With best wishes for many happy returns of the day—for Dru—from Arthur Wingham.'

Poor Arthur! I was almost sorry; for he was a

very moderately successful artist. And machines cost money. But 'twas a lovely bicycle!

I rode it by nature. I have supple limbs and had danced so much. Besides, the art of balance came to me of itself. That is one of the many traits I inherit in full measure from my arboreal ancestry. The bicycle emancipated me; it is the great emancipator. It put me back at one bound from the bonds of school to something like the old freedom I remembered and sighed for. And it took me once more to country roads. I hate London. I am of Arcady.

In some respects, indeed, I admit, school had made me younger again. I lost a little of the precocious wisdom of my days on the road—what Arthur Wingham called my 'artless shrewdness'—and grew simpler and more childish. Perhaps it was in part the woman awakening within me; that has always a strange softening effect on the tomboy nature. And though I was never a tomboy, I had been wild enough and wayward enough when I strolled the road with the One-eyed Calender and the First Murderer.

Once mounted on a bicycle, however, I was free once more to roam the highways of England, unaccompanied and unchaperoned. Except on Sundays —when Arthur himself most often accompanied me. He liked to see how I was getting on with my riding, he said; and besides, when I was alone with him, I let my little devil loose to peep out more frequently than before Linda and Stodmarsh. He admired that little devil, he told me—one of the nicest small imps

sent forth from the Inferno. I tore down country lanes with him, or through folds in the downs, my loose black hair flying comet-wise behind me. My hair is an anarchist: it despises the governmental restraint of hair-pins. Prim and trim at the start, it bursts its iron bonds before the second milestone. Arthur loved to see it so. 'That suits you best,' he used to say, after I had reached the mystic age of 'putting it up,' and nature tore it down again. 'Rules are not for you, Dru. You are a lawlessness unto yourself: and the lawlessness pleases.'

John did not bicycle; his particular vanity was golf, the most soberly diplomatic and judicial of games; a Lord Chancellor might play at it, or even an Archbishop. Still, to prove to me that he rose superior to prejudice, he gave me a cyclometer. 'Does it go well?' he asked me when I returned from my ride, all dusty and panting, on the first day I used it.

'Capitally,' I answered, pinning my hair in a knot. 'I tried it with several measured miles, and it keeps splendid space.'

'Keeps what?' he asked, looking puzzled.

'Splendid space,' I answered, giving the pedals a quick twirl. 'You say of a watch that it keeps splendid time, John; so, *by parity of reasoning*' (it was his own pet phrase), 'I suppose to keep splendid space is the proper virtue of a cyclometer.'

He stroked a dubious chin with deliberative finger and thumb. 'What odd expressions you use, Rosalba!' he remarked at last, in a half-remon-

strant voice. 'You should purify your style—by reading Dryden.'

'Dryden says nothing about bicycles,' I replied, caressing my little steed as if it were a pet mare; and stroking the saddle fondly. We were in front of Sir Hugh's grass-plot—the conventional green oval which carriages sweep round.

'I am not quite sure that the world was not better without them,' he mused on. 'I agree with Bowles that I do not care to ride ironmongery. And many of the women who bestride bicycles nowadays are of such an ungraceful type. Just look at that angular Miss Fitzroy, who is leaning on her machine over there, talking to Linda! So different from Linda's flowing carriage! And her feet—how unwomanly!'

'They must be cubic feet,' I exclaimed, glancing across at them.

'My dear Rosalba! A cubic foot is not larger than other feet; it is a square foot in three dimensions. Ask Miss Westmacott to make this clear to you. On the literary side, you are not without culture; what you want is mathematical and scientific training.'

Arthur had strolled up meanwhile. 'And what *you* want, Stodmarsh,' he broke in, laying his hand on the saddle, 'is a sense of humour. Get Dru to supply you with some of her surplus stock.'

John looked decidedly black. He was serene as a rule in his placid consciousness of his own superiority to the rest of the race; but if there is one imputation which no human being, young or old,

can endure with equanimity, it is the imputation of a lack of humour.

So, to turn the subject, he drew me aside half-paternally with one arm round my neck. It was the first time he had ventured on that familiarity, and it jarred. 'How pretty those flower-beds are!' he said, making the easiest remark that occurred to him in his confusion. 'Sir Hugh has really a first-rate gardener. The place is kept perfectly.'

'My *dear* John!' I cried. 'Those stiff regular circles! Concentric rows! Scarlet geranium; blue lobelia; yellow calceolaria! The very beggary of taste—the refuge of the incompetent! You can't mean to tell me you really *like* them. I call them vulgar.'

John was quite huffy. He drew himself up very straight and expanded his chest beneath the spotless white waistcoat. His fingers toyed almost nervously —if John could be nervous—with the seals on his watch-chain. 'My child,' he said, in a crushingly authoritative voice, 'I am head of a department in a Government office, and fellow of an Oxford college. I think I ought to know what is vulgar as well as *you* do.'

I saw I had hurt him, and I drew back at once. 'Yes, John,' I answered meekly. He was really very good and kind and generous—and—a bargain is a bargain. Besides, I felt grateful to him for one piece of good taste which I detected in the inflection of his voice as he spoke his last sentence. He was just going to imply that while *he* was the fellow of an

Oxford college, *I* was only a poor waif and stray, of doubtful Italian origin, picked up on the highroad. But his better nature intervened in time, and he checked his tongue before even his tone suggested anything to hurt me unnecessarily. I noted the altered tinge and gave him due credit for it.

But at the same time I felt—well, scarlet geraniums, you know! And I a born Italian, with an eye for colour!

Arthur Wingham respected my faculty in that respect, and so did Auntie. She took me often to Arthur's rooms, and there he consulted me at times about the arrangement of the folds and shadows in draperies. So much depends upon the tone in the shadows. You make or mar a picture by one pleat or wrinkle too few or too many.

Auntie and Arthur also encouraged me in another small fad of mine—they read or listened to my first literary efforts. Oh, those stiff little tales—so crude, so amateurish! I keep them still, and die of laughing at them. John did not quite approve of these girlish attempts of mine to write stories. 'They are an endeavour on the part of an immature mind,' he said, in his austere way, 'to do that which only mature minds are fitted to accomplish.'

'But surely, John,' Auntie cried, 'it must be good for her—as practice.'

'You wrote Latin verse at school yourself, you know,' Arthur suggested, for they had been at Rugby together.

'M'yes. That was different,' John replied, snapping

his mouth down firmly. 'We wrote them as an exercise, under proper supervision, and with critical correction of our errors by our elders. I have always considered that *part* of my success as a writer of State Papers'—he never alluded to his dispatches except as State Papers; it sounded so important—'has been due to the excellent training I received in Latin prose under Jex-Blake at Rugby.—Mind, I say *part* only,' he added as an afterthought; 'for much, of course, must always be attributed to the individual bent of mind. The statesman may be trained; but he is born, not manufactured.' And he folded his umbrella tight, as was ever his wont when he reflected on the seriousness of his own position. John seldom appeared in public without an umbrella, rolled as small as possible: 'twas an element of religion with him: he would have carried it in Sahara.

In spite of John, however, the impulse to write was in me, and, well or ill, I wrote accordingly. The spirit bloweth where it listeth, and no man can hinder it. High or low it blows; for honour or dishonour. Arthur Wingham took a great interest in these my early little efforts. He kindly gave them that critical correction of an elder mind to which John attached such immense importance. It was he, indeed, who first suggested to me the existence of *style*. My own small tales were as wholly improvised as my childish plays on the highway. I showed them to him or read them aloud, and he pointed out to me the commonplace rawness of their workaday wording.

Not a sentence or a thought struck out with a flash of light, like sparks from a flinty road: all plain and colourless. 'Recollect,' he said, 'it is not literature to write down events or ideas in the chance form that first happens to occur to you; 'tis studious care of the phrase, the epithet, the emotional atmosphere of words, that gives literary value.'

'But surely, Dudu,' I objected—he made me call him Dudu—'the great poets were inspired; they spoke the visions that occurred to them in the words that nature and their own genius supplied.'

'I think not,' he answered; and I always felt Arthur was a fine critic—indeed, I believe he would have succeeded better in literature than in art had it not been for his modesty. 'If you read your Shakespeare with open eyes you will see for yourself with what consummate skill the phrase is varied, with what elaborate care the sentence is built up and the image perfected. His vocabulary alone betrays years of accumulation. Most readers fancy that Shakespeare trilled forth his native wood-notes wild as spontaneously as a thrush or a linnet. I cannot agree with them. No man had ever a brain so astounding that it could spin out those endless felicities of phrase with a running pen. That is art, not nature.'

'But in your own art,' I cried, 'see how certainly, Dudu, you and Auntie can draw a figure, perfect in line from the first, with absolute knowledge. It needs no alteration; it is right from the beginning.'

'That is true of Linda's work—yes; and of all

consummate artists. But why? Because long study has taught them how to see the true line before they set pencil to paper. Skill like that comes not by nature, but by long study, long observation, long practice.'

'And may not the artist in words,' I asked, 'attain in time a like mastery of his craft? We beginners need to mend and tinker our sentences: a Ruskin or a Meredith smites out at one blow the perfect image.'

'That is true too,' he answered; 'but why? Because they have learnt their art. You must be an apprentice first before you become a master-craftsman.'

I do not know that I agreed with him; I do not know that I agree with him even now. I am by no means sure that the truest literature is not that which wells up spontaneous like a limpid spring from the soul of the writer. Erasures, afterthoughts, seem to me treason to your individuality. Even in Dudu's own art, it was his own large insight, his strong virility, his first broad conception that I admired, not his individual touches. I dislike niggling. But I saw that so far as this age at least is concerned, his view was the sound one. The world demands from us now not so much great torsos as finished cameos. I set to work to curb and correct my poor little style—if I have one: I tamed my wild zebra; I taught him to trot laboriously in harness like the neatly docked and trimmed Parisian carriage-horses he set before me as models. So far,

that is to say, as my native intelligence permitted me to follow them; for I am a mountain foal; I submit ill to the bit, and long at every turn to take it between my teeth and bolt for freedom.

Dudu particularly desired me to study Guy de Maupassant. He looked over my work with the stern eye of a schoolmaster. 'You do not pay enough attention to your verbs,' he would say. 'Just look at Maupassant's! French verbs sparkle and coruscate. English verbs lurk unseen. But that is not all. French verbs clamp the whole together; like the piers of a Gothic church, they support and sustain the entire fabric. English verbs, like pegs on a clothesline, serve only to restrain a loose flapping mass of nouns and adjectives. Aim at strengthening your verb-vocabulary; if you make that strong, all the rest will follow.'

And this to the wayfarer that had learnt literature on the highroads of France, improvising little plays for the village mothers!

Nevertheless, I felt his advice was right. I recognised now that writing was an art, and that Dogberry was mistaken in his pretty belief that it came by nature.

John Stodmarsh was kind about instructing me too: he took under his direction my studies in logic and political economy. On both of these subjects he lent me books and gave me impromptu lectures. I read Mill and Jevons in my leisure hours to please him. But somehow, though it sounds ungrateful to

say so, I could never take *quite* the same interest in John's lucid explanation of the relations between capital and labour, or in his sedative discourses on spheres of political influence, that I took in Arthur Wingham's remarks on rhythm in French sentences. Their soporific quality—but John was really an excellent fellow. If I have ever laughed at him, my laugh had no malice in it.

About Dudu's own art I will not trust myself to speak. He preached a Gospel in his pictures. 'Twas a vigorous, original, personal Gospel—a virile evangel; strong meat for men; the world has not yet accepted it. Like Robert Browning's Grammarian, 'He's for the morning.' Perhaps some day I may write about Dudu's Gospel. But not just yet. I do not feel my wings strong enough.

Dear, modest, self-effacing, calm-souled Dudu! He held his Gospel so strenuously that he forgot to advertise. And the world to-day (as General Booth knows) is converted by advertisement.

CHAPTER XVI

A SLIGHTED COMMANDMENT

I CALL the upper and the nether gods to witness that I was guiltless of intent to wreck Miss Westmacott's happiness. But towards the end of my third year at the High School for Young Ladies an Event happened.

It was a Tuesday; and Tuesday afternoon was always a half-holiday at ours as at other High Schools. For you may naturally imagine, Events were not likely to occur in Miss Westmacott's establishment except on half-holidays.

I had had a slight altercation that morning with Her Imperturbability. It arose out of a question of faith and morals. As a rule, Miss Westmacott left all such questions severely alone, so far as I was concerned. She was afraid of them, three deep. In the first place, she was aware of the fact that I had been brought up a Catholic. In the second place, she knew that, unhappily, by my guardian's wish, I was exempt from all manner of religious instruction. And in the third place, she was never quite sure what unexpected bombshell a child of the open air, a southern nomad, reared by One-eyed Calenders and

Italian organ-grinders, might fling broadcast at any moment among the innocent English ranks of the Select Young Ladies. She pictured them, gaping open-mouthed at my blazing indiscretions. To be foreign, to be a Papist, to be the ward of a gentleman of agnostic leanings, and to have been dragged up on the highroads of continental Europe—can you figure to yourself a more appalling combination of adverse circumstances in the eyes of a Survival in a crimped cap and corkscrew ringlets?

So Miss Westmacott as a general principle excepted me altogether, not merely from those lessons in the names of Jewish kings and the doubtful doings of Assyrian harems which go by the comical name of 'religious instruction,' but also from such casual moral remarks as she addressed to her classes in the course of other subjects. She feared I might draw her into irreverent discussions, or question the finality of her ethical principles. On this special occasion, however, *à propos* of I forget what particular Plantagenet prince, she happened to lay down the general law that implicit respect as well as implicit obedience was due from children to parents. 'You must honour your father and your mother,' she remarked in her massive way, with a clenching nod of the crimped cap, 'not merely because they possess qualities deserving of honour, but also because it is God's ordinance.'

'How can you honour them, though, if they have no qualities that command respect?' I objected. 'That's clearly ridiculous.'

'My dear Rosalba! what *dreadful* sentiments! A parent with no qualities that command respect! If you think such unbecoming things yourself, you should at least refrain from suggesting them to your innocent companions.'

'But who could honour a drunkard or a thief?' I asked, growing warm—my logical sense being clearly outraged.

The feebly Roman nose sniffed the air with dilated wings, and the corners of the sleek, camel-lipped mouth went down in little puckers of gathering disapprobation. 'My dear Rosalba,' Miss Westmacott said again, her faint moustache bristling, 'I was thinking, of course, of girls brought up—well, the girls you meet here—in this class-room—do not associate with thieves or—er—drunkards.' She uttered the painful word with a natural shrinking.

'But we were talking of general principles,' I retorted. Once set on, I could not withdraw till we had threshed out the question with Latin logic. 'You put it generally, that under all circumstances we must *honour* our fathers and our mothers.'

'I honoured my own dear Mother——' Miss Westmacott began. She was pure Anglo-Saxon in her inability to grasp a logical idea.

'Oh yes, of course,' I interrupted. 'I can imagine that. I can picture your mother.' I pictured her at once after my accumulated knowledge of the insipid miniatures of fifty years ago—an equally massive lady with a still more Roman nose, still stiffer curls, and a still bigger cap with large frills round the

edges. 'But how can any one honour a father or mother who treats her, say, with injustice—gross, palpable injustice?'

Miss Westmacott's face summed up the sanctions of morality and religion. The faint moustache positively quivered. 'Rosalba,' she said briefly, drawing herself up very stiff like an archaic Artemis, '*you* may consider this a proper subject for argument and debate. *I* do not; and before these girls, for whose teaching *I* am responsible, I must request you to abstain from further remarks upon it. It is our clear duty in all stations of life to honour our parents, irrespective of their particular failings or weaknesses. We should shut our eyes to all such. We should decline—nay, more, we should be unable to recognise them. The discussion is now closed.—Ethel Moriarty, what happened to the prince as the result of this unnatural and unfilial conduct? how did Providence frustrate his nefarious plans against the crown of his father?'

In Miss Westmacott's mind, to ignore was to abolish.

That afternoon we went out for our exhilarating walk, as usual, in Regent's Park. It was our sole form of exercise. We were crocodiling toward the gate—the elder girls at the crocodile's head, and the younger ones filing off by degrees toward his tail in the background—when near a corner of the road an old woman came up and began to beg from us. She had been slouching along with a ragged man, but she left him to come towards us. I call her an old woman, because that was how she struck me at first

though on looking nearer I could see she was not so much old as sodden with drink, and aged before her time by want and exposure. She was of a type quite familiar to me—just such a broken-down ruinous woman-tramp as those who trailed in ill-fitting ghosts of shoes after the One-eyed Calender and the First Murderer. I drew aside my dress as she passed me; Heaven forgive my pride! I did not care now for the hem of my garment to brush against her.

My instructress, just in front, under full canvas, with Ethel Moriarty, was talking massively *to* her but *at* me on the eternal and immutable duty of implicit obedience and respect for parents. The will of God was clear. Miss Westmacott had no room in her brain for doubts: she had fathomed to an ell the mind of Omnipotence. 'One knows, of course,' she said in a sleek little deprecating voice, 'that there *are* ranks in society where it must be difficult to some extent for children always heartily to follow that particular commandment; they may have to close their eyes with an effort against the true character of dissolute or abandoned parents; and one admits that in such cases the struggle may be hard—though even there, we know, for duty's sake it should be fought out and Satan conquered. But happily in *our* class of life——'

At that precise moment the woman in the road drew near the kerb and began in a whining voice, 'Ah, thin, me dear young lady, 'tis yerself that 'ud be afther helping a poor hungry soul, bless the pretty

face of ye; for sorra a bit or a sup has passed my lips——' She drew back with a quick scream: 'Holy Mother of God!—shure if it isn't Rosalba!'

I shrank back into myself. 'Mother!' I cried, with a catch in my throat. 'Mother!'

She took three short steps forward, Agag-wise, like one who treads hot coals. Then she stared into my face. 'An' pwhat 'ud ye be doin' here,' she asked, still half-incredulous, 'dressed loike a lady an' all—ye that run away from home wid a tramp in Italy?'

She made as though she would fling her arms around me. I withdrew in horror. Yet the sense that this was my Mother—*my* Mother!—filled me with double shame—shame that she should be such; shame at my shame of her. I could not refuse her embrace; I could not permit it. I longed for earth to yawn and swallow me whole. I envied Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. But earth in emergencies is always unsympathetic.

'Ye remimber me, Rosalba?' she asked coaxingly.

'Yes, Mother . . . I remember you.'

I spoke as in a dream. It was too horrible to realise.

Miss Westmacott had halted her line at the first hint of this scene; as I uttered those words, her feebly Roman nose assumed of a sudden a force and vigour of which I should scarce have conceived it capable. 'Girls!' she pealed out in a tone of Napoleonic command, 'walk straight on to the Park! Ethel Moriarty, I hold you responsible for the good conduct of all. Go once round the inner

circle as usual, and then return to the house.—Rosalba Lupari, stop behind!—All the rest of you, forward immediately, and do not look behind you!'

They marched on like soldiers. Miss Westmacott turned to me with stern severity. 'Rosalba Lupari, what do you mean by applying to this vile and degraded creature such a hallowed name as Mother?'

My Mother pressed forward. 'Shure, the young lady is roight, intoirely,' she put in. 'Rosalba Lupari, that's her name; and me own is Bridget Lupari by the same token; an' 'tis her mother I am; an' phwat young lady like her could let her own mother want for a bite or a sup in a Crischun country?'

Miss Westmacott held her off at arm's-length with the handle of her parasol. 'I did not address you, creature,' she said. 'I addressed Miss Lupari. . . . Rosalba, what does this mean? *Will* you have the goodness to say at once and decisively that you have never before beheld this object?'

'I can't, Miss Westmacott. She is—my Mother!'

Miss Westmacott stared at me, and then at her. She drew a long breath, and paused for half a minute. 'Well, I think I may safely say that in all my life——' she began.

'My—Mother!' I repeated, gasping.

Miss Westmacott lost words for a while. 'Your conduct,' she said at last, when speech was vouchsafed her, 'is *most* unbecoming a lady or a Christian. Your guardian has entrusted you to my

care, and it is your duty to obey me. I *order* you to declare that you have never before set eyes on this monstrous personage; and twice over you decline to follow my plain instructions. Say, "This is not my Mother!" Rosalba, I command you.'

'It *is* my Mother,' I replied, faint and ill with horror.

'As you persist,' Miss Westmacott went on, 'there is but one course open to me.' She held up her parasol to a passing four-wheeler. 'Get in, Rosalba Lupari,' she said. I obeyed mechanically.

'Now, creature,' still holding her off with the end of the parasol, 'sit there by the driver.—I apologise, cabman, for inflicting this unsavoury being upon you; but you shall be well paid for the inconvenience. —Get up by his side at once. Do you hear me, woman?'

My Mother did as she was bid, half dazed. Miss Westmacott took her seat by my side and drove home in ominous silence. Only once did she break it. 'This shows the danger of quibbling casuistically with plain moral commands,' she muttered in a high tone, with her moustache all tremulous. 'Your guardian stands to you in the place of a parent; he confides you to my care; it is therefore your clear duty to obey me implicitly. But you begin by denying the obligation to obey, and you end by claiming a drunken Irishwoman in the street as your own mother.'

'She *is* my Mother!' I cried. 'I do not love her; but I will not disown her.'

We stopped at the school door. 'Get down, creature!' Miss Westmacott said; and my Mother descended. 'Come into this room!' She opened the door of the box-room. 'Take that chair!' It was a plain wooden one. 'Sit there while I send for this young lady's guardian!'

My Mother said never a word. Whether she was dazed by Miss Westmacott's masterful manner, or waited to learn what she could make out of this episode, I do not know. But, at any rate, she said nothing.

'Maria, bring some pastilles and burn them in the room to disinfect this creature,' Miss Westmacott went on, holding her dress away as if pollution might come upon it. 'Creature, do not speak to her. Maria, refrain from asking the creature any questions—Rosalba Lupari, bring me a telegram-form from the study table.'

I brought it, trembling.

Miss Westmacott read over each word aloud, as she wrote it, with great deliberation, in her calm, well-bred way. 'John Stodmarsh, Esq.'—not even in a telegram would she have docked dear John of his Esquiredom for untold gold, let alone a ha'penny—'Local Government Board, Whitehall. Come at once, if possible. Rosalba Lupari has committed a grave indiscretion.—JANET WESTMACOTT.'

I ventured to remonstrate. '*Grave indiscretion* is so misleading,' I said. 'You will fill John's mind with false surmises.'

Miss Westmacott was adamant. 'What I have

written I have written,' she replied. 'Maria—this at once to the nearest telegraph office!'

Till John came, I was shut up in the drawing-room with Miss Westmacott. Meanwhile Maria, burning pastilles from time to time, continued to watch and fumigate my Mother. It was like Trinculo with Caliban—'most excellent monster!'

When John arrived, Miss Westmacott saw him alone. Then they both adjourned together to the box-room. Below in the drawing-room I heard the confused murmur of voices, sometimes loud and angry, sometimes low and remonstrant. At times my Mother sobbed; at times she coaxed and wheedled. Next came a calm: a sudden calm. No sounds reached me. At last the front door opened and Maria went out. When she returned, it was with a cab, and a man whose voice sounded like a policeman's. As a matter of fact, I learned later he was a commissionaire. I heard my Mother's voice in the hall—'Bless yer honour's good heart; and may yer honour live for ever an' doy happy! Shure 'tis yer honour that has pity upon a poor broken sowl, far from her frinds an' her counthry and the noble grand majestic scaynery of the West Coast of Oireland, where she was born and bred among dacent people! If ever yer honour wants——'

'The cab is waiting,' John interposed in his driest voice. 'Remember; not one step nearer England than Paris or Brussels; no large town; and payable weekly. I stop it if you disobey.'

'Ah, an' 'tis for yer honour that I 'll be praying all the blessed saints——'

'Come to England, and that instant it ceases.'

I heard the front door shut abruptly, and John murmur to Miss Westmacott, 'Well, she won't trouble us again. We are rid of *her* at any rate. But, pah, what a creature! Will you kindly allow me to go upstairs and wash her off my hands, so to speak? Some sense of moral pollution: one needs disinfection. A little *eau de Cologne*—oh, thanks, how good of you!'

I burst out into the hall, against John's directions and Miss Westmacott's. 'You haven't let her go?' I cried. 'Oh, you haven't let her go? I did so want to ask her . . . about my dear, dear Father.'

John's face was rigid. 'Your Mother is quite enough,' he answered, 'without troubling about your Father.—But she could tell you nothing. As you may perhaps have guessed, she left him two years ago.'

And the ragged man! With crimson cheeks I managed to stammer out the one word, 'Alone?'

'No, not alone,' John answered. And then there was deep silence.

Miss Westmacott knew what 'God meant' by everything. I wished I could emulate her. It was a sore trial of faith, a terrible mystery, why He should have given me *such* a mother.

CHAPTER XVII

NEWS FROM THE MONTI BERICI

I STAGGERED up to my own room for a while to recover from my emotions. Turbulent storms swept through me. I longed, I prayed, I wrestled for annihilation. By and by, John sent me up word that Miss Westmacott and he would like to see me, if I felt capable of an interview. So soon! so soon! I washed my eyes and descended. John was calm but kind in a certain sober, official, politico-economical fashion. He tried his best not needlessly to hurt my feelings. Up to his lights, I mean; but dear John's lights on emotional questions were not quite incandescent. I do not think he understood how poignantly I was suffering.

'Miss Westmacott and I have been talking this over,' he began in a cumbrous, hesitating way; 'and we are both agreed that after what has occurred it will be quite impossible for you to remain at this school any longer.'

'My duty to my other pupils!' Miss Westmacott interposed, setting her mouth very hard and jerking out short exclamatory sentences. She sat like a

statue, massively indignant. 'No animus against your ward, of course, Mr. Stodmarsh—most remarkable behaviour! But when I first took her in I *felt* that the extremely doubtful antecedents——'

'There is no necessity to go into that now,' John answered manfully. 'Rosalba has suffered; you must see for yourself that her nerves are shattered temporarily.—We feel, Rosalba, you would not desire to meet the other girls after this expo—this unfortunate occurrence. The woman who upset you will not return to England; I have guarded against that; and I will keep myself informed through her priest as to her whereabouts. But *you* we must place elsewhere. On that, Miss Westmacott is quite as convinced as I am.'

'Oh, impossible to keep her,' Miss Westmacott intervened, imperturbable still, but resolute. 'Incalculable harm done already to the other girls. My only plan to say that this unutterable Irishwoman had been Rosalba's foster-mother; and that Rosalba was so agitated at meeting her after years of separation in such a degraded condition—a few weeks at the seaside—rest and change of air—a complete nervous shock; I see no other way out of it.'

'Perhaps, Miss Westmacott,' John interposed, noting my fiery cheeks, 'if you were to leave my ward and myself alone, we might arrange this affair between ourselves more easily.'

Miss Westmacott was on edge. She rose and sailed loftily out of the room, as I could imagine her

mother sailing, with a turban on her head and three ostrich-feathers in her hair, from George the Third's presence. 'If I am not wanted,' she remarked at the door, her nether lip protruding like the prototypal camel's, 'I am sure I am glad to be relieved of this *most* unpleasant duty. I distrusted the girl from the first; but unhappily I permitted myself, against my better judgment, to be talked over by Mrs. Mallory. I can only pray now that the moral poison your *protégée* has imported into my school may not have infected——' the rest of the sentence died away inaudibly but imperturbably down the recesses of the passage.

John carried me off to Auntie's that very night. I think his annoyance at Miss Westmacott's point of view made him more gentle and sympathetic than he would otherwise have been. He was so nice and forbearing, indeed, that when he had talked to me for awhile about my future and my new school—for he meant to send me elsewhere—I rose up for the first time in my life and spontaneously kissed him.

That encouraged him to say, 'I suppose you have guessed, Rosalba, for what object I am educating you?'

I quivered and looked down. 'I think so, John,' I answered in a low voice at last. I fear my downcast eyes and my whispered words misled him a little; for he took my hand in his and murmured very softly, 'This will make no difference to me, dear; I still mean it.'

'Thank you, John,' I answered. I recognised that,

from his own standpoint, this was magnanimous. 'You are very good and kind. I am—deeply grateful to you.'

'Then, you will marry me, Rosalba?' he went on, leaning forward almost affectionately. 'My poor child, I am so sorry for you!'

His kindness went to my heart like a dagger. I felt myself a hypocrite. 'Yes—I will marry you,' I faltered out. A bargain is a bargain. And he had really touched me that evening by his genuine generosity.

He went on to talk of his plans for my happiness. 'It never occurred to me,' he said in a gentle voice, 'that you wished to learn about your Father. I thought the past was a dead past behind you. But if you still desire to know, Rosalba, why not write to the Monti Berici?' He laid the accent on the right syllable this time. He had forgotten *me*, but remembered his lesson.

Strange as you may think it, that simple idea had not once yet dawned upon me. When I left Italy, I seemed to leave all things Italian behind me; and though I had longed and wondered, I never dreamt of writing to ask. I told John so, simply.

'I will write for you, dear,' he answered, with one hand on my arm. 'Write in my own name to make inquiries merely—write as a friend who is interested in you.'

'Oh, how good of you, John!' I cried. For myself, I feared and dreaded it so much, I could never have written.

'But you must not expect a very pleasant account,' he continued, playing with a paper-knife. 'After your Mother, you know, we can hardly look forward to finding your family—well, flourishing and creditable. I fear your Father——'

'My Father,' I said, the pride of the Lupari asserting itself even then, 'is an Italian patriot.'

'In my experience,' John answered, setting his lips, 'a patriot means a man who hopes to make money out of his country.'

In spite of everything, I believed in the Lupari legend still. 'You mistake, John,' I answered. 'He has made sacrifices for Italy. I love and respect and admire my Father.'

John was kind enough and wise enough to make no answer.

A few days later, while I was still at Auntie's, looking about me for a new school, and recovering from my shock, which had shaken me to the core, John came back with a letter. He did not show it to me; he read from it. 'Your Father does not write himself,' he began. 'This is from your sister Mariana.'

I jumped at the worst. 'He is dead!' I cried. 'Oh, tell me?'

John saw it was useless to try breaking the news. 'Yes, he is dead,' he answered, making a movement forward.

I gave a shriek of despair. You may fail to understand it, but all those years I had loved and longed for my Father. I had always looked forward to

returning some day to the Monti Berici to see him. He had filled my day-dreams. And now, the swelling consciousness of the wrong I had done him broke over me like a wave. It stunned me with its impact. Remorse gnawed at my heart. I uttered one wail of horror, and then fell fainting.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN UNREHEARSED EPISODE

SOME days passed before I had strength of mind enough to read Mariana's letter. When I steeled myself to turn to it, I learnt that my dear Father had been dead some months, and that he died a good Catholic—'fortified with all the consolations of the Church,' my sister said piously. Mother had left him, Mariana went on without further note, a couple of years earlier—'and a good thing, too, *per fortuna*, for she was getting too much for us.' That was all about Mother. Most of the letter, however, rang with the name and the fame of Uncle Giuseppe, who about the same time had come back from America. I vaguely remembered this Uncle Giuseppe; he left us under a cloud when I was a baby. He emigrated to the Argentine, I fancy, which is what the Italian peasant always means when he speaks of 'America.' And now he had come back, Mariana wrote, in rather vague terms—studiously vague, I thought—and was 'taking care of her.' I laid down the letter with a sinking sense of being alone in the world. Till then, *home* meant to me the Monti Berici still; I had always looked forward in some dim future

to returning there and meeting my Father. Now, there was no one left in the place whom I cared to see; for, in a way, I felt I had outgrown Mariana.

Yet some things in Mariana's epistle puzzled me. To begin with, she wrote from Milan. Her letter gave no date of place, it is true, but the postmark read 'Milano'; and when I examined the envelope, I found its flap bore the name and address of a stationer in the Via Alessandro Manzoni. Now, what could Mariana be doing in Milan, I wondered. Then, again, there was an air of conscious restraint about the wording of her sentences. She told me nothing of herself, nothing of her surroundings. Her reticence seemed calculated. I gathered that Mariana did not wish me to know her exact whereabouts, or desire that I should communicate further with her. She wanted to cast me off. Perhaps that was natural.

I set out for my new school a few weeks later. It was a school in the country (Heaven be praised!), kept by a much younger and more modern woman—a school of the latest type, with a brand-new headmistress direct from Girton. Her coiffure suggested the higher mathematics. It was neatly braided in many plaits and coils. She was not mediæval. I was happier there than at Miss Westmacott's; but I will not trouble you much with that second school: it is immaterial to my story. My life lay outside it, in the times I spent at Auntie's or elsewhere.

During my next vacation, when I was nearly nineteen, Arthur Wingham came down to stop at Auntie's.

He used often to paint me still, and he made me pose for him in some of my Shakespearean scenes, which I still loved to impersonate, though without the dollies. I have said that he made me call him Dudu—it had been his mother's name for him, he told me: and I was so fond of him in a girlish way that I liked to call him so. The Great Awakening had come upon me, but not consciously as yet; I thought we were still just boy and girl at play together.

We rode often over the open downs side by side on our bicycles. A dark heather-clad ridge bounded the view from Auntie's cottage to westward: solitary clumps of Scotch fir stood out at intervals like lonely obelisks against the pale skyline. There we delighted to ride. After the niggling scenery of the lowlands, these broad horizons hold one. For miles and miles we saw neither house nor man: we moved alone with nature. Speckled adders lay coiled on the road at times: the cry of the jay startled us from the pine-woods.

Beloved Pan, how I have loved you! How I have seen you half hide, goat-footed, in cool brake and moist thicket! What oreads and naiads, what fauns and Sileni of my southern home have mingled for me with the pixies on the English moors! Am I not still part Pagan? Have I not had sight of Proteus rising from the sea, and heard old Triton blow his wreathèd horn?

One afternoon Auntie went out, and I was left alone in the studio with Dudu.

'You must sit for me as Miranda, Dru,' he said, with an almost imperious air, when I strolled in after lunch, for he ordered me about like a brother. 'I want to finish that study.'

'Very well, Dudu,' I answered submissively: I am an obedient creature when I am not in open revolt: so I went upstairs to array myself in the flowing white robe, almost Greek in its simplicity, which I had devised for the character.

When I came down, Dudu arranged my draperies as he wanted them for the study, and posed my bare arms on the parapet of pasteboard rock in Prospero's cave. I was conscious of a faint lingering of his fingers on my arms as he posed them.

Then he took up his palette and stood irresolute in front of the easel. I waited for him to begin. He looked up at me, then down at the unfinished study, then up at me once more, then let his hand drop listless.

'Why don't you begin?' I asked, quivering.

His eyes gazed through me. 'I can't,' he answered. 'O Dru, Dru, Dru, I don't want to *paint* you!'

'I thought you *liked* painting me,' I murmured. My own heart beat faster.

He made a quick little gesture of the hand. 'I love it, and you know I love it!' he answered.

'Then why not begin?' I asked again. My breath came and went hurriedly.

'Because—because, I want to talk to you,' he replied, coming nearer, 'not to paint you.'

I broke the pose, and drew back to a chair.

'Then—talk,' I said faintly, letting myself drop into it.

'I mustn't,' he answered. 'Ah, Dru, you understand! You know how I feel. For Stodmarsh's sake it would be wrong. It would be . . . treason to Stodmarsh.'

I knew he was quite right. 'It would,' I answered, rolling the words on my tongue, 'treason . . . to Stodmarsh.'

'And yet, Dru——'

'Yes, yes: I know, Arthur.'

He turned to me with a grateful look. 'We two don't need to speak. We understand one another—darling.'

I nodded my head, 'Too well, dear Arthur.'

'Dru, he is my friend.'

'Dudu, he is my guardian—and I have promised to marry him.'

'But—you love me?'

'I never quite knew it—till to-day,' I answered, with a catch in my throat.

'But—you suspected it?'

'Oh yes, I suspected it; but—I never admitted it. I tried to shut my eyes. I tried to pretend—to pretend it was only friendship.'

He made the same quick gesture again. 'And so did I. Fools both! The old, old blind! That silly pretence, friendship!'

'Still, Dudu, we mustn't say so even to one another.'

'No, no. I know that. I am a brute to have said even as much as I have said to you.'

We both paused and drank one another in with our eyes. For a long time neither spoke. Something thrilled through the air. Electric tremors came and went. Then I broke the silence.

'Dudu, I must not speak to you of this again.'

'Nor I to you, dear one. For John's sake, I am ashamed of myself.'

'It was my fault. I led you on.'

'No, mine. I am a man: a man is for that: I ought to have been strong enough.'

'We must never do it again.'

'Never. . . . But still—O Dru!—you said you loved me!'

'N—not quite.'

'Well, at least, you admitted it.'

I blushed crimson. 'I couldn't help it,' I answered. 'Dudu, it was ever so wicked: yet I'm glad we know, because now . . . we understand each other.'

'We do.'

'But we must never speak of it again. I feel we have done wrong. John has cause to be annoyed with us.'

There was another long, delicious pause. This time, Arthur spoke. 'And you mean to marry him?'

'I must. There is no other way. I cannot get out of it now. I owe him so much; and—a bargain is a bargain.'

'You are right. Ah, Dru, I am so ashamed of myself for this! John has trusted us both. We have betrayed his trust. We have behaved very ill to him.'

'Very ill. I am ashamed of it.'

'And of me?'

'No, never of you, Dudu. You love me. How could you help it, then? Everything is forgiven to one who loves much—*quia multum amavit.*'

'So we must say good-bye to all this?'

I bent my head. 'For ever.'

'If so, I may, just this once—for good-bye!'

He leant over me. My lips trembled. One hand held my heart, to keep it from bursting. 'Yes, once —only this once—for good-bye, Dudu!'

He stooped down and pressed my lips hard. At that moment, oh how I loved him!

Then we both moved apart—quickly, reluctantly—and sat far away from one another on the seats of the studio.

After that, assuming a tone of cold morality, I told him very firmly (from a safe distance) how this must never happen again; and how wrong and deceitful it all was towards John; and how much I really respected that excellent man, in spite of his little priggishnesses. He had always been good to me, and I had been a hypocrite. I was a little beast not to love him when he had done so much for me. I could not quite love him—my heart being otherwise occupied—but I was grateful, really grateful—I hoped. At any rate, not for worlds would I do anything to break my compact. 'I love you, Dudu: but John I will marry.'

'And when you are married, Dru, what shall I ever do? You will allow me to see you?'

I reflected and was wise. 'When I am married, Dudu,' I said, shaking my head, 'I shall not let you come near me. You must invent some reason for dropping my acquaintance. The great gulf of marriage must be fixed between us. It is the only safe way' (see how prudent I was!), 'and the only course that is just to John. After what has occurred to-day, I will not see you at all . . . when once I am married.'

I said it, firmly meaning it. Yet, alas! how weak is human nature! After I was married, I saw Dudu almost every day; and every day I saw him I loved him better. Do not prejudge me because I make this avowal. Wait till you have heard all, and then decide whether or not I was justified.

CHAPTER XIX

'THE LUPARI'

WHEN I was a little over nineteen, I left school: in the funny phrase which girls use, 'my education was finished.' It might be fairer to say it was just beginning.

I 'came out' under Auntie's auspices. John attached importance to the social function of coming out: he also designed that I should be presented, 'on my marriage,' by Lady Duddleswell, the wife of a Cabinet Minister. My future husband thought a great deal of the Duddleswells: their daughter Gwendoline he often proposed to me as a pattern of lady-like conduct and high intelligence. She had *a mind*, he said: she was a girl of understanding. My own understanding John did not rate high: he thought me sprightly but shallow. 'My dear Rosalba,' he wrote to me once, 'by this post I am sending a note to Linda to ask her whether she and you will consent to be my guests for a few days at the hotel at Lyndhurst in the New Forest. I am tired out with my official work; and I require conversation which will involve no excessive intellectual effort.'

John did not propose to marry me at once. In

that, as in everything, he was justice itself to me. 'I should be taking an unfair advantage of you, Rosalba,' he said, 'if I were to urge you to marry me before you are twenty-one. Indeed, since I am your guardian by courtesy only (though I have your Mother's authority in writing), I could not do so without your parents' consent—and that, you may readily conceive, I do not choose to ask for.'

'As you wish, John,' I answered, letting my eyes rest on the vast sweep of the sandstone ridge with its solitary pines. I love these great panoramas better than all the paradises of the landscape-painters—*bits*, they call it. The broad horizons teach one resignation. For myself, I *was* resigned. I did not love John; I could not love him: but I respected and liked him; and since I was bound to him by every tie of promise and maintenance, what did it matter to me whether he married me this year or next or the year after? I loved dear Dudu; I realised that now: but I could never marry him. John had claims upon me; those claims I must satisfy. I could not eat his bread for so many years and then turn round and refuse to fulfil my part of the bargain.

The intervening time before my marriage I spent with Auntie—John paying by arrangement for my board and lodging. He thought it the best plan. But we often went up by invitation to his house in Avenue Road, St. John's Wood, where I was introduced to his friends—wives and daughters of Cabinet Ministers—as Miss Lupari, whom he intended to

marry: 'She lives at present with her adopted aunt, my cousin, Mrs. Mallory. . . . Linda, dear, will you bring Rosalba over to be presented to Lady Macpherson?' For John made a point of doing everything decently and in order. If he married a waif and stray, he would marry her by the card, lest equivocation should undo her.

One day, during one such visit, I was shopping with Auntie in Bond Street—buying airy little daintinesses such as John loved to see me in—when a victoria drew up at the door of the shop we were just quitting. A lady descended from it. I must do her the justice to say she was a properly 'grand' lady; Mariana would have rejoiced in her. But she was also strikingly pretty. Dark, mignonne, with large melting eyes and a delicately moulded nose, she had an infantine downiness and roundness of face which suggested a ripe nectarine. Her own wee gloves were not softer or daintier. She was exquisitely dressed, with rather more regard to fashion and less to picturesqueness than I myself prefer; but granted the *genre*, her taste was unimpeachable. The fluffiness and filminess of her fly-away chiffons just suited that waxen dark peach-coloured cheek. I stopped to gaze at her. So did Auntie, frankly.

It seemed an innocent babyish face withal; but I saw, on second thoughts, it was the innocence of a Greuze, not the innocence of an Angelico, or even of a Reynolds.

As I gazed, I was aware that the lady's eyes lighted upon me with an inquiring glance, and then

retreated under shelter of the softly fringed eyelids. The length and darkness of those lashes struck me as strangely familiar. So did the pomegranate mouth, the dimpled chin. But the lady brushed past us as though she resented our looking at her. She brushed past us with such an air of suppressed eagerness, such a furtive side-glance under the covering shadow of the long velvet lashes, such a worldly-wise dimpling of the small cheeks by the corner of the rich mouth, that I felt sure she was anxious to avoid our observation. I allowed her to pass in; then I whispered to Auntie, 'I am going back again—to look at her.'

She was seated by the counter as I entered, with her back towards the door, and she said to the girl who waited upon her, in a very musical voice with just the faintest tinge of Italian accent, 'I want to see some silk chemises, if you please—prettily trimmed—the newest style—with coloured ribbons.'

I knew that silvery-liquid voice among ten thousand. 'Mariana!' I cried, faltering.

She turned and eyed me through a tortoiseshell eye-glass—one of those atrocious long-handled aristocratic outrages with which very grand ladies choose to gorgonise their social inferiors. 'I beg your pardon,' she said slowly, 'but—you have the advantage of me.'

'Auntie!' I exclaimed, turning to Mrs. Mallory, 'this is my sister Mariana, about whom I have spoken to you.'

Mariana transferred her stony stare to Auntie. I

am bound to admit she did it thoroughly. The set of her small mouth spoke volumes of reticence. 'Ah, your Aunt!' she murmured, raising her arched eyebrows.

'She is an acquired Aunt,' I went on.

'Indeed!' Her tone was icy.

'Mariana,' I said again, 'don't you know me? I am Rosalba.'

Still she did not commit herself. 'Rosalba?' she repeated with a far-away air, as if the name sounded dimly familiar, like church-bells under water. 'You call yourself Rosalba.'

I knew what she was doing. She was waiting to gain time; watching for straws which might show what way the wind blew; and reflecting whether or not it would be wise to recognise me. Was I the sort of person to do her good or harm? Would I assist or hurt her social advancement?

'I had certainly a sister of that name once,' she answered at last, in her sweet voice, after she had closely noted Auntie's dress, her brooch, her gloves, her bonnet. The small mouth parted its lips a little. I could see her making a mental note to herself—'Externally presentable; case for further inquiry.'

For ten minutes she fenced, turning over the silk chemises meanwhile, and making running comments upon them intended to impress us with a proper idea of her grandeur. 'I can do better in Paris.' Then she drew Auntie aside and asked a few direct questions. I could not overhear them, but from a stray word or two which reached me I caught at

the drift of Auntie's answers. 'Adopted niece. . . . Name well-known as a painter. . . . Gentleman of position—head of a department in the Local Government Board. . . . Not till year after next. . . . Most liberal allowance. . . . Oh yes, excellent schools. . . . In every way a lady.'

After that, Mariana tripped prettily back to me, and extended her hand with a forgiving gesture. 'So long since I have seen you, dear!' she said with a tender trill in that musical voice of hers. 'You fell upon me like a tile, and you can easily understand that, under all the circumstances, I did not recognise you.—Accordion-pleated, if you please. How much? —And even when I began to realise that it was you—well, I wished to understand your relation to—to that other member of our family who, when I last heard of her, was also in London. You will see at once that for a person in My position it would be highly undesirable to be brought into contact with a person in hers. I have my position to maintain.' And Mariana simpered.

'You are married, I suppose?' I said, just a little awestruck at the superior way in which she held out her dimpled cheek demurely for me to kiss. I kissed it with what I must call official affection.

'Oh no! not married.—I will have three of these, if you please, and three of the batiste with the Valenciennes edges.—Not married, of course; but surely you have heard of me; you know of my success; you read the papers?'

I confessed to having failed to notice her name

in the journals of my native country. What could an English schoolgirl know of Parisian operatic triumphs?

Mariana simpered again. 'Uncle Giuseppe has brought me here,' she said, turning over some lace handkerchiefs with a deliberative smile, and speaking sideways at me. '*Caro zio!* I have an engagement at the new opera-house. I have been singing in Paris. You must surely have heard that Zio Giuseppe had me trained for the operatic stage? Under Ronzi of Milan, you know—the last survivor in Italy of the old Italian school of singing. Zio Giuseppe came back rich from America—did I mention it when I wrote to you?—and he has adopted me, my dear, adopted me. Odd coincidence that, under such different circumstances, we should both of us have been adopted!' And Mariana sucked—no longer her thumb, but the tortoiseshell ball in the eagle's claw on the handle of her umbrella.

By this time she had decided mentally that I was quite presentable, and she invited us, therefore, to drive with her in her victoria. I accepted the offer; Auntie declined: I think she left us alone on purpose. We took a turn round the park, Mariana dwelling as she went on her own present grandeur, the gifts she had received from her admirers in Paris, the applause she had gained in the part of Carmen, and the splendid prospects which opened out before her. She did not tell her story: it transpired. Facts trickled out piecemeal. But she also managed, parenthetically, to extract a large amount of information

from me as to my own position and future. She was an adept in the unobtrusive use of the common pump.

Did I sing? she asked anxiously.

'No,' I answered. 'Not anything to speak of.'

'Or play?'

'Well, the piano a little. Strum, strum, strum! I play at playing.'

That evidently pleased her. 'You see, dear,' she admitted frankly, 'it would be so bad for Me if a sister bearing my name went in seriously for music.'

'I appreciate your anxiety,' I answered frigidly.

This did not repel Mariana. Before she dropped me again at Auntie's door, in the flats off Victoria Street, she had satisfied herself, I think, as to John Stodmarsh's place in nature, and the desirability or otherwise of cultivating my acquaintance. We parted the best of friends. She gave me her cheek to kiss quite warmly this time, and begged me to come and see her soon at the Hôtel Métropole. 'So delightful to meet you again, dear!—Home, Simmons!'

As she drove off with a nod and a smile, I feel sure she was congratulating herself that Rosalba, after all, had done nothing dreadful; and that if she was adopted by a distinguished lady painter, and about to marry a civil servant of means, she must be reckoned in the game as an element of strength rather than of weakness.

During the next eighteen months, accordingly, I saw much of Mariana—that spoiled child of fortune.

After her first doubts were dispelled, she realised quickly enough that my position rather helped than hindered her in English society. 'Her sister, you know, is engaged to Mr. Stodmarsh of the Local Government Board—a rising man, sure to get into Parliament and be a Cabinet Minister.' So Mariana made much of me. Uncle Giuseppe she kept judiciously a little in the background; though even Uncle Giuseppe had the natural *savoir faire* of the Lupari family, and being an Italian who spoke very broken English, was less likely to betray himself than if he had been born, like ourselves, in the parish of St. Pancras. I liked Uncle Giuseppe: he was the good-humoured *nouveau-riche* who exults in his prosperity with boyish pride. But Mariana took care he should not see too much of me. Uncle Giuseppe's means were ample for one, but would be insufficient for two, as Mariana saw things. That was why, I now understood, she had been so anxious to say little about Uncle Giuseppe's fortune when she wrote to me from Milan. He died a year later, and left Mariana everything. Mariana went into respectful mourning, provided herself with a paid duenna, and continued to sing and earn money easily.

'The Lupari' indeed became a fact in London. She sang sweetly in her demure, mouse-like way; and her old-fashioned Italian habit of producing her voice in a level stream, without any of the fashionable French tremor, produced a great effect. Everybody spoke of her: bouquets fell like summer hail: her bosom, in last acts, was a blazing Golconda. I was

introduced to strangers now as 'the Lupari's sister, you know—the one who is engaged to Mr. John Stodmarsh.' I took Mariana to see John, and also Dudu. I was a little afraid, I confess, of taking her to Dudu's. Why afraid, you will ask—seeing that Dudu was the merest acquaintance? Well, I had half an idea that Dudu might admire her. And why not? Well, I was fond of Dudu—and he had painted me so often—and—a woman is a woman! I did not want that dainty Mariana to take my place as model.

But when I saw Dudu next after Mariana's first visit, I asked him, a little tremulously, what he thought of her.

He paused and looked at me. 'What I thought at the Monti Berici,' he answered after an interval.

I wondered whether I remembered aright. 'And that was——?' I inquired.

'That she is you—with the spice left out; you without the flavour, the originality, the individuality, the savour; you, with no wilful petulance, no flashes of wickedness; in one word, you, with that attractive little devil of yours omitted.'

'Her dimpled chin!' I cried.

'Yes; soft and round. Yours has character. Soft dimpled chins, like a wax doll's, go with love of frivolities. They have no depth in them.'

'But—she is so very beautiful—much, much prettier than—than I am, for example.'

'Prettier—*je vous l'accorde*—in the chocolate-box sense. A nice mouse-like wee thing, with peachy-

downy cheeks and long trembling eyelashes. The very model for a Christmas number. Lots of fellows could paint her—and do her full justice. There are faces that make one despair: hers is not of them. She is the average brunette, pushed to the highest term of which the average brunette is capable; but one atom of fire, one particle of personality—nowhere. She would make what ordinary people call a likeness, not in any deeper sense a picture.'

'The English care more for likeness than for beauty,' I murmured.

'The English care more for prettiness than for soul,' he answered. 'But a face like hers has no more than prettiness. Another face I know has so much deeper riddles in it—one has never finished reading it. 'Tis a face to make a man realise the impotence of his art. Its very perversities are endless. I could paint it all my life, and feel at the end I had not reached the end of it.'

'Still—her eyes—

"Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould"—

Dudu. Such eyes!'

'Mariana's eyes? Mariana's? A bird-stuffer could match them with bits of coloured glass and a wax fringe of long lashes. Whereas there *are* eyes—unfathomable—obstinate questionings of invisible things.—Mariana! Nonsense!'

'Then—you will not dispossess me as model in her favour?' I asked, colouring.

'Dispossess you? What a question! Such obvious

prettiness as hers! Dru, one crook of your mocking little finger is worth more than many Marianas. *You* are a Giorgione; *she*, a study by a meretricious Parisian painter.'

He was nothing to me, of course—nothing to *me*, who was to be John Stodmarsh's wife; but . . . it made my heart leap to hear him say so.

Seeing Mariana brought the Italian home-sickness nearer to me than ever. Italy draws: I longed for Italy. I love it still: I have never ceased to love it I shall not be satisfied till I have explored every nook from Friuli to Calabria. Nay, more, before Persephone claims me, I trust that I too shall have wandered in the fields of Enna.

Aunt Emily's villa, where I write these lines, stands with its pink-washed walls on the terraced slope of the Monti Berici. A close screen of tapering black cypresses cuts it off from the olive-yard. Cicalas buzz there. From the round-arched loggia with its Corinthian pillars—antiques, I fancy—you look down past the gnarled mulberry-tree on the burnt-up grass-plot to the mouldering balustrade: and over the balustrade you may catch blue glimpses of the shining plain, or in the distance the Alps, just seen through the shimmering haze of Lombardy. Below, campaniles of neighbouring villages: Romanesque campaniles, with twin round-topped windows set high on their towers. Everything mossy and lichen-stained and broken-nosed, from the armless Apollo on the pedestal by the parapet to the nymphs that

pour driblets of water, by green oozy tags, from their cracked urn in the grotto by the arbutus. And that is Italy!

There, in Aunt Emily's villa, whither he took me at last . . . but my inveterate habit of getting in front of my story has quite run away with me.

CHAPTER XX

THE BRINK OF THE PRECIPICE

MARIANA, in her rôle of elder sister, was able to settle the date of my birthday, which I had either forgotten or never known. As its twenty-first anniversary drew fatally near, bringing with it the penalty and forfeit of my bond, I became more and more aware of the hateful nature of my compact with John Stodmarsh. Mariana, of whom I saw much now, could not understand my unspoken reluctance to marry him :—'Such an excellent match —a county family, too—he will be knighted in time, they say, dear; at the very least, knighted; and then, you will be Lady Stodmarsh; perhaps, indeed, he may be made a peer before he's finished. So sweet, a peerage! But even a knighthood is always something. It would be a splendid thing for Me if I could talk of "my sister Lady Stodmarsh."' Mariana, turning her green-beryl eyes upon me in mild amaze, seemed to think it almost unnatural on my part that I should wish to deprive her of this innocent enjoyment. She had hopes of a certain courtesy Lord Reggy for herself, and considered that even a knightly title for her sister might go

some way on the road towards securing him. She meant to exploit me.

She exploited most people. She had indeed a curious variant on the Midas gift. Whatever gold chanced to pass her way, Mariana's little fist closed over it naturally.

As to Dudu, of course I spoke as little as possible to him about the matter. To speak of it would have been to court defeat. We would both have betrayed ourselves—and John. So I kept dead silence. But we looked the more. And our looks told us everything. Mine, reluctance; his, infinite pity.

Yet I flew right into it, none the less. A sense of honour, of my duty to John, made me forget my still clearer duty to myself as a woman. I admit I was wrong. I felt it in the sequel. But honour misled me; and I had no one to guide me.

Some weeks before the date arranged for our wedding, John spoke to me of his plans. It was a tawny autumn day, at Patchingham. We had climbed the sandstone ridge, where the heather was now brown and the wet bracken shone like burnished copper. Rain had fallen overnight, but the day was hot. A curdy white mist of winged seeds rose and floated from the basking spikes of willow-herb. All was dim and autumnal. It seemed to me a fitting day to discuss that grey event, my marriage.

'We will have to get a dispensation, of course,' I put in, when John paused in his remarks. 'Without a dispensation, no Catholic can marry a person outside the Church.'

John stared amazement. 'You don't mean to say,' he exclaimed, 'after all the books I have lent you to read, you still believe that——' I think he was just going to say 'that nonsense,' but he checked himself in time, and substituted for it the slightly less offensive phrase, 'that mass of dogmas?'

I was firm, but quiet. 'What I believe, John,' I answered, 'is a matter for myself; what I wish to do is a matter for discussion between us. And I may as well confess at once that I should not be happy in marrying you unless I had a dispensation.'

'But you never *said* you were a Catholic,' he objected in his positive way. (I am not positive on the point, but I *think* John was a Positivist.)

'I do not say so now,' I answered. 'It is a large proposition. Besides, I did not want to differ from you. One can believe a thing without protesting too much. One can dissent without dissidence.'

He eyed me suspiciously, as though he fancied I was making game of him. 'Still, you have never confessed,' he said again.

'What need for confession? Our life at Miss Westmacott's—so painfully blameless!'

His face clouded. 'Very well,' he said slowly; 'if you really feel it necessary, Rosalba, to get a dispensation——. Though I *should* have thought, after all I have taught you—— And Miss Duddles-well, too, of whom you have seen so much, is a lady of such sterling logical qualities!'

'Let us be reasonable, John,' I broke in, plucking the bells one by one from a spray of brown heather.

'You are not surprised that most Englishwomen desire to be married in church instead of at a registry-office—now don't quote Mill at me!—rationally or irrationally, it gives them a greater and securer sense of human and divine sanction. You are still less surprised that they desire to be married rather than to dispense with a ceremony altogether; I fancy you would be shocked if, like Héloise, they felt otherwise. Well, *I* have been brought up in a particular faith, however foolish, and it gives me just that sense of security and sanction if the priests of my faith bless my union. Without it, I should feel uncomfortable—and you do not wish to make me feel uncomfortable in the most important step of my life, do you?'

'No, certainly not; but still—you have read and discussed with me so many sceptical books—Comte, *First Principles*, *The Origin of Species*, *Supernatural Religion*—that it never even occurred to me you were still a Catholic.'

I intrenched myself behind my individuality. 'John,' I said firmly, 'there is one subject I decline to enter into with anybody, and that is my own inner and personal religious sentiments. I prefer to discuss mundane matters. Questions of fact, questions of science, questions of the historical basis of Christianity, I will talk over with you; but not my feelings. Those I hold sacred.—Still, since you seem to think some discrepancy exists between my intellectual attitude and what I now say, I should like to make you understand that what attaches me to the Church is just its catholicity.'

John's thin lips curled. 'Catholicity and catholicism are very different things,' he answered.

'Very different things,' I admitted. 'Some would say opposite. But that only shows the wisdom of the Church—she has room in her bosom for both those extremes. Some love her for her catholicism; some for her catholicity. I am of the last. I love her because she can shelter a St. Thomas Aquinas and a St. Francis of Assisi; because she can give a niche to the narrowest sectary and to the widest humanitarian; because she embraces and allows for all human types; because she finds room even for *me*, who would fraternise just as easily with a sincere Mohammedan or a sincere Buddhist as with a Dominican or an Anglican.'

I am not, I hope, a bigot. I cannot swallow a religion whole, as if it were a pill. All those whom I have loved and trusted most in life have belonged to the alien faith, and I have never questioned the rightness of their belief. My own attachment to the church of my fathers is rather a sentiment for the forms and words one learnt in childhood than any real sympathy with the rigid dogmas of the Vatican. I have not fathomed the Infinite, like Miss Westmacott; nor am I even sure that red-robed cardinals have done so. Latin comes more easily to my lips in prayer than English—that is all, perhaps. But John is lacking in emotional subtlety: and his supercilious air of intellectual superiority turned me for the moment into a papal apologist. I defended Rome—because John despised it. That is the way of a woman.

John shuffled uncomfortably. 'Well, if you wish it,' he said at last, 'I will make inquiries about this —this so-called dispensation; though I confess, if you make me go through a ceremony at a Catholic church, I shall feel a trifle ridiculous.'

'Did you think of getting married at an English church or a registry-office?' I asked.

'At an English church, I suppose.'

'Then, John, don't you think your objection just a wee bit sectarian? Does it not lack catholicity?'

The question took him aback. He stared at me in astonishment. The fact is, dear John was in favour of the fullest and freest inquiry everywhere—provided always it led you in the end to the very same point he himself had arrived at.

'Well, no,' he said, wriggling uneasily on his seat among the heather, and washing his hands in nervous pantomime. 'In England, you see, the established church is the established church; it has position and —er—well, official sanction. I am an officer of the Government. For me to be married at St. George's, Hanover Square, is analogous to the coronation taking place at Westminster Abbey. But to choose for the ceremony a Catholic church—well, it is bowing needlessly in the Temple of Rimmon.'

'I see,' I said, rising. 'You will bow in a Temple of Rimmon authorised by your Government, but not in one which is merely chosen by the woman you propose to marry?'

He gave way, grudgingly. 'Oh, if it is a matter of conscience,' he said, 'however much I may regret

that you have not outgrown those early superstitions—as I hoped you had done—of course you shall be married in a church of your own choosing. On questions of etiquette—what dress you shall wear or what priest shall marry you—you will find me always a most tolerant person. Miss Gwendoline Duddleswell is an excellent judge of temperament, and she tells me tolerance is one of my marked characteristics.'

That evening I related the whole conversation to Auntie. She looked at me very gravely. 'Rosalba, dear,' she murmured, seizing my hands in hers, 'he does not understand you: he will never understand you! I begin to have doubts about——'

'About what, dear?'

'About my own wisdom in ever letting him take you!'

'You need not,' I answered. 'It is too late. Spilt milk. An oath! an oath! I have an oath in heaven! And besides, I can see now it was quite inevitable.'

Auntie smoothed my wandering hair with her hand—'tis a peculiarity of that anarchic hair of mine that it will *never* keep in place—and repeated slowly, 'I begin to have doubts—grave doubts. Yet, I did it for the best, dear.'

I bent my head. 'I know you did, darling.' I struggled hard against my tears. 'You thought you were giving me such a chance in life. And then too, I consented.'

'But you were too young to understand—too young

to give consent. I ought to have seen he was quite the wrong person for you. A high-spirited girl—a man like John Stodmarsh! But when he spoke to me of it, I thought only of the excellent position it offered. I said to myself, "Shall I be justified in keeping her here as my model—this beautiful, clever, aspiring child—when a man like John Stodmarsh would make her his wife?" The very unselfishness with which I tried to put my own convenience out of the question misled me.'

'Don't speak of it, dear!' I cried. 'If you do, I shall break down. I—I can *do* it, but I can't bear to discuss it.'

'We *must* discuss it,' Auntie cried. 'We *must* discuss it before it is too late. I can't let you marry him if you do not love him. That is the one wicked thing a good woman can do—to marry without love. Rosalba, I will not allow you to do it.'

'It is a geographical question,' I answered, trying not to look too grave. 'In England you are expected to marry a man because you love him; in Italy you are expected to love a man because you have married him. John is an excellent catch. His family came over, like the Slys, with Richard Conqueror.'

'You shall not jest about it, dear. This is far too serious. I never suspected till now how deep it went. But I see it in your eyes. Rosalba—do you hate him?'

'Hate him? Dear Auntie, oh no! I like him; I respect him; I am fond of him in a way; I am very

grateful to him—but . . . respect is a bloodless substitute for love: and I do not love him.'

'Then you must not marry him!'

'I must. There is no help for it. I owe him so much that I cannot refuse him. 'Tis a question of common honesty and the open market. I have become a commodity. I promised him; he has paid his sequins down for me; I must keep my promise.'

'No, no: it was not *you* who promised; it was a little Italian girl, too young to understand. I will not let him marry you.'

I turned the matter over bitterly in my mind. 'Auntie,' I said at last, 'there is no going back now. The whole thing has been a mistake—my education and all of it. He saw me, and was taken with me: why? because I was a wild, wayward Italian child of the road, full of quips and cranks and strange precocious wistfulnesses. Because I was other than himself. Because I was a romantic little southern ragamuffin, half gipsy, half poetess, flashing out when he touched me. And what did he straightway do with me? Send me to a stiff-and-starched English school, where they taught me geography and the use of the globes, and stuffed me with algebra, and did their level best to drill out of me the very wildnesses and waywardnesses and quips and cranks which made him first take a fancy to me. John and John's deputies tried to mould me into their own likeness. They tight-laced my soul. I had wings, and they clipped them. I had dreams, and they woke me from them. Miss Westmacott "toned me down." I

did not need toning down: I needed development along my own lines. If I remain in any way like what I was before John Stodmarsh took me in hand, it is because of three things, and three things alone —yourself—the bicycle—and——'

'And what?' For I checked myself.

'It is not *what*,' I answered, flushing crimson.

Auntie bent forward and clasped her hands. 'O Rosalba!—not Arthur Wingham?'

'You have said it,' I answered, dropping my eyelids. Then we were both silent.

When we spoke again, Auntie held my hand hard. 'I might have guessed it!' she cried. 'I might have guessed it! With your romantic nature, how could I ever have let John Stodmarsh have his way? I ought to have known that so proud and so sensitive a girl—— But I thought it *such* a good match—and everybody said, what splendid luck for you!'

'Sir Hugh is rich,' I replied obliquely. 'Sir Hugh is the head of an old county family. Sir Hugh is a Member of Parliament and a very great gentleman. And yet—there are women whom he longs to ask, and who could not dream of marrying him.'

'Rosalba, don't turn the barb in the flesh. I am suffering for it already. It is my fault—mine. I led you into it.'

I kissed her hand. 'No, no; it had to come, and it came.'

'Why, my child, that is fatalism!'

'Yes, dearie: and I am a fatalist. But I know

that Fate's other name is Circumstance. She creeps upon you unawares. An accident here, a coincidence there, and—pa-ta-ta—before you know, her meshes are about you: she holds you bound hand and foot in her toils for life.'

'But, my darling, if you love Arthur Wingham, that settles the question. I can not allow you to marry one man when you love another. It is the unforgiveable sin. I—I will speak to John about it.'

'Auntie,' I cried, rising and fronting her, 'if you do, I will deny it to your face! I mean to marry John. I must marry John. John is a proud man—he thinks more of himself than of any one or anything else on earth—*his* dignity and *his* importance. It would be a shock to his *amour propre* to learn that the girl he had deigned to select for himself and to educate as a lady in spite of her origin, the girl he designed for the singular honour of being His Wife, preferred, positively preferred, an obscure artist. John has been very kind to me. I will not put this open slight upon him. It would be black ingratitude. His money is nothing to me. Not for the wealth of the Incas would I sell myself to any man. But obligation, honour, my plighted word! Whatever comes, I will keep my compact. That is plain justice.'

'Rosalba, Rosalba, don't say you will marry him!'

'Yes, Auntie, I will marry him. Whatever you say or do, I am absolute to marry him.'

Next morning, as I sat at my little creeper-covered

window in Auntie's cottage (drying my hair, which with me is a long operation), I overheard Sir Hugh Tachbrook and Auntie, in the verandah below, discussing me. I hate being discussed: but I could not help hearing them.

'So she is going to marry that man Stodmarsh, at last, after all?' Sir Hugh blurted out in his stentorian voice (Sir Hugh has no idea of talking private matters over quietly). 'Well, well, I'm sorry for it.'

'Why so?' Auntie asked in a much lower tone.

'Because she'll do just what you'd expect from one of her kind—marry Stodmarsh—and then, within six months, bolt with that painter-fellow.'

At the time, his words flushed me with indignation and injured pride. Yet which of us knows, till temptation comes, whither our passionate hearts may hurry us?

CHAPTER XXI

MORE THUNDERBOLTS

JOHN objected to banns; we were to be married by licence.

He was always charming about money-matters. When it came to my trousseau, he handed me a blank cheque. 'Ask Linda and your sister to fill it up mentally for whatever sum they think suitable to a lady in your position—the position of my future wife—and then add one-third to the figure they decide between them,' he said. I crumpled it in my pocket, with a burning sense of shame. But I had not the heart to put John to the open disgrace of refusing him. And if I took him at all, I must take him with all the consequences.

Mariana was in her element choosing my trousseau. A rampant daughter of success, she loved shopping, even vicariously: she knew the shops, and the shops knew her. Introduced by her, I went everywhere. As she flitted from counter to counter with her frills and gorgets, she reminded me of a humming-bird. She darted into piles of embroidered under-linen, and flung herself on the details of my going-away

dress with a frivolous fervour which I confess even the woman within me failed to make me emulate. Would you have lawn or soft wool? is cambric being worn? how would that dainty Honiton lace suit with these sweet little nighty-gowns? It made my heart sink. I realised the slavery into which I was selling myself.

The awesomeness of marriage chilled my soul: its terrifying irrevocability! To spend a lifetime with John—what a foolhardy experiment!

One morning in those days, towards the end of the trousseau ordeal, I called round at Mariana's early. She had promised to go out with me to superintend the boot-and-shoe department. '*Chaussure* is *so* important, you know!—with the possible—just possible, exception of *coiffure*, nothing more important!' But when I reached her rooms, I found her suffering from an obvious fit of annoyance. 'That is the worst of being known, Rosalba!' she moaned to me softly, with a chilly little shiver of her shoulders in their delicate fluffy morning-wrapper — for Mariana is *frileuse*. 'Fancy that, now; a telegram addressed simply "Signorina Lupari, Londres," and it is delivered to me straight! Handed in at Saint-André, 10.20 A.M.; sent out from Curzon Street at 11.30. Comes direct to my door. I call it abominable.'

'What is it about?' I ventured to ask, perceiving no special cause for Mariana's annoyance.

'Oh, *her*, of course!' Mariana answered, shuddering again. 'She dogs us through life. But it won't be long now. If you like, you can read it.'

I took it up and read, 'Am dying. Come out at once to see me. Mother.'

My face burned hot. 'O Mariana!' I cried, 'are you going to her?'

'Going to her? What an idea! *Che sciocchezza!* Is it likely I should go to her? Have I not spent all these years in trying to avoid her? have I not sedulously kept my address quiet from her? have I not paid her well never to come near Paris or London?'

'*Paid* her, Mariana?'

'Why, certainly—paid her. Don't hang your jaw like that, stupid! It was well worth it, was it not?'

'But—John was paying her too, for the very same thing. She has taken money from both of you!'

She shrugged her shapely shoulders with an impatient air. 'Very likely. I should have guessed it. La Mamma was quite capable of it.'

'And Saint-André. It said on the placards as I came along, "Explosion at Saint-André, in Burgundy." Could that have anything to do with it?' And I seized the morning paper.

'No doubt,' Mariana answered with a moody-listless air. 'Last time I heard of her, she was hand in glove with an Italian anarchist.'

'Here it is!' I cried, running my eye down the column of latest telegrams. '"Explosion at Saint-André! Attempt to blow up the French President!" Why, Mariana—it mentions her. "Among the injured is an old woman of the name of Lupari, said to be an accomplice: she asserts that she is the mother

of the well-known opera-singer. She is, however, apparently an Irishwoman. Her condition is despaired of."'

'I shall deny it flatly!' Mariana cried, starting up and growing very red. 'To drag Me into this matter! Infamous! Infamous! I shall declare that the woman has nothing at all to do with me.'

'Then you will not go to her?'

'My dear Rosalba! even for *you*, what a question! No, I will *not* go to her. To go would be simply to ruin everything. It would be to admit the relationship, and wash our soiled linen—our too painfully soiled linen—before the eyes of Europe. Let us confine our skeleton to its appropriate cupboard. I am not quixotic. I will pay to have her buried—one can do *that* quietly. But go to see her—no, no! 'Twould be absolute suicide.'

'*I* shall go,' I said simply. 'I see no way out of it.' I shrank from it inexpressibly; but I could not shirk it.

Mariana tapped her pretty little foot once or twice on the carpet. 'If you go, Rosalba,' she said, after a minute's pause, 'I shall never speak to you again.' She clearly regarded that as a most tremendous threat; for dear Mariana has always had an excellent opinion of her own importance. 'Why should you wish to ruin My prospects—and your own—for the sake of that—that wretched creature?'

'I shall go,' I answered, 'even at the risk of incurring your perpetual silence, Mariana.' A wave of remorse swept through me. 'I let my dear Father

die,' I went on, 'without being by his side to kiss him farewell. I was a child then, and I did not realise. But it has haunted me ever since—haunted, haunted, haunted me, in the dead of night, when I lie awake, and the clock strikes hour after hour, and the rain beats on the roof, and I think of Father. I cannot make the same mistake again. I must go to my Mother.'

Mariana drew a deep breath. 'And such a mother!'

'She was all the mother we had,' I answered.

There was a long pause. Then Mariana began again, her soft chin sulky, and no longer dimpled. 'You have not money enough to take you there,' she said coldly; 'and I am happy to say I feel sure Mr. Stodmarsh will not care to supply you with any, for such a purpose.'

'That is true,' I replied. I had almost completed my trousseau and spent my thirty pieces of silver. Then I waited and reflected, 'Mariana,' I said at last, 'you have plenty. If you will not go yourself, at least assist me in doing what is for both of us a duty. Lend me ten pounds—to go and see our Mother.'

Mariana's voice might have frozen the Thames. It was clear as a bell, and frigid. 'I will not lend you one penny—to ruin both of us. All the world must hear of it, if you insist on going: and they will learn that my Mother was a—well, was what we know her to have been. If *I* can prevent it, you shall never go. You will compromise yourself; and what is worse,

you will compromise Me. I have my Future to think about.'

I rose from my seat and moved towards the door. 'Where are you going?' she asked, rising and trying to intercept me.

'To Mother,' I answered, with my fingers on the handle. 'I cannot keep away. I must to go to her, instantly.'

'How will you get the money?'

'That is my affair, Mariana. You refuse to find it for me. I must raise it elsewhere.'

I descended the stairs, stumbling, and mounted my bicycle, which was waiting obedient at the door. After Mariana, it seemed quite sympathetic. As hard as I could make my sinuous way through the streams of close-packed traffic—cabs and omnibuses darting upon me from all sides—I hurried round to the Local Government Board. 'Mr. Stodmarsh is engaged, Miss.' 'No matter'; I took out a card and wrote on it 'Urgent,' thrice underlined. 'I must see him at once. Give him that. I will wait for him.'

In a minute, I was ushered up into a small side-room, very scantily furnished. It had an orderly confusion of blue-books and papers on the table—as one might expect from John—and there John soon came to me. 'Excuse this barn,' he said hastily, glancing round him at the neat red-tape-tied bundles. 'I am busy to-day—very important State Papers to talk over with a Cabinet Minister. But I explained the nature of the interruption to Sir Andrew'—he glanced at my card—'and he kindly excused me for

just three minutes. We both feared we knew the object of your visit—for we have seen the paper. I sympathise, dear Rosalba; but we must act with caution. Your sister, Mariana, will, of course——'

'John,' I said, 'I am going to her.'

'To Mariana?'

'No, to my Mother!'

He gazed at me, stupefied. 'My dear child,' he said at last, 'it would be a fatal blunder.'

'I cannot help that!' I said, and then I told him how I felt, as I had told Mariana. He listened respectfully, but with disapproval growing visibly on his clean-shaven face each moment. When I had finished, he said with forced calm, 'You must not go, Rosalba.'

'I am going, John.'

'I forbid it. Categorically.'

'I can't let that weigh with me. This is a question of duty. John, I never asked you for money before; but I ask you now. I want money to go to my dying Mother.'

'Rosalba, I grieve to refuse you anything: but I must protect you from yourself. More than that. You are not yet of age. By your mother's express consent in writing, extracted from her that day at Miss Westmacott's, I am your guardian.' His lips grew thinner as he spoke. 'I stand to you therefore *in loco parentis*, and I *forbid* you to go to her.'

'John, there is a higher sanction that compels me to go.'

'No, Rosalba; if you insist upon going, you must

understand the penalty.' His lips faded out. 'On every ground, I forbid you—as your guardian, and as your future husband. Do you understand that? You are not to go to her.'

I bowed my head. 'Very well, John,' I answered.

He grasped my hand, misunderstanding my 'Very well.'

'That is right, dear,' he answered. 'Now I must return to Sir Andrew. Let me see—what engagements have I this morning?' He consulted his notebook—he was the slave of notes. 'Ah, I lunch at the Duddleswells'. At three, I go with Lady Duddleswell and Gwendoline to the Old Masters. Very well, then: at half-past four I will come to Linda's to discuss this more fully with you.'

He glanced at his watch and bade me good-bye. 'Good-bye, John,' I answered. I meant it. Then I went downstairs again.

I hardly knew what to do. Auntie was in Cambridge. She had gone to attend some social science congress or other grand talkee-talkee—I forget the particular name of it: she loved such frivolities. I could not wait. I must go off that afternoon by the club train to Dijon—Saint-André is a village about five miles off. I knew not where to turn. One thought alone possessed me now. By whatever means, I must go to my Mother.

One chance remained. I mounted my bicycle and rode round to Dudu's.

I rushed into his studio, hot and flushed, in a turmoil of excitement. He saw at once that some-

thing serious had occurred; and he set me down in an armchair and leaned towards me deferentially. I told him the whole story much as I have told it here —my visit to Mariana, the fatal telegram, Auntie's absence, my interview with John, and the rest. When I finished and paused, crimson but proud, he laid his hand on my arm—'And you will allow me?' he cried eagerly.

'O Dudu!—I would allow you—anything!'

'Have I enough, I wonder?' he cried, opening his purse. 'Dru, darling, is fifteen pounds sufficient? If not'—he glanced about him—'I could raise it—somehow.'

'It would be ample,' I said, 'for the moment. When I get there, I may need more—in case she dies —to bury her. But that would do, for the journey and hotels at least. O Dudu! how good of you!'

'And how good of *you* to let me! I should not have dared to ask you if you had not half suggested it. Dru, you are too kind to me. And—you will let me go with you?'

'No, Dudu,' I cried. 'Impossible. What would everybody say? We cannot keep this thing quiet. It has got into the papers already. It will all come out now. I must go—alone—to her.'

'But—I can't bear to let you go alone. May I not follow—at a respectful distance?'

I shook my head. 'I am a born Bohemian,' I said; 'and for myself and you, I trust you. But we have others to think of—John's pride—and Auntie.'

'When do you mean to start?'

'At once. This afternoon. Going home to pack a few things in a bag, if there is time. If not, just so, in the gown I am wearing.'

'And you will go alone—to this dreadful little village—among anarchists and what-not—alone and unprotected?'

'Oh, I am not afraid,' I answered. 'Anarchists are my brethren. I was born anarchic. Remember, to me continental countries are not strange as they are to you English. I am quite at home in French and Italian. I can take the people as they are. And I have lived on the road. Rough folk do not alarm me.'

He held my hands. 'Still, Dru'—he spoke wistfully—'*if* I might follow and take care of you!'

'Arthur,' I cried, 'I see what you are thinking! You half mean to sneak after me.'

He looked sheepish. 'I *did* mean it,' he answered like a schoolboy detected in a scrape. 'I thought I would let you go, and then steal quietly after you.'

'Promise me you will not!' I cried earnestly. 'It would be a great mistake. O Dudu, I beg of you, promise me, and keep your promise!'

He struggled for a while; but I made him do as I said. At last he answered, 'Well, Dru, I promise it.'

'That's right, dear!' I cried. And I pressed his hand gently.

He bent forward. 'Then I may, Dru? You are no longer John Stodmarsh's.'

I waved him aside tenderly. 'Not yet, dear,' I

answered. 'Not just now—not to-day—when my Mother is dying.'

I rose to go. But I was faint with excitement: the ground reeled under me. I caught at a chair. 'How white you are!' he cried. 'You must have a glass of wine!' And he fetched a decanter.

I seized his hand to check him. 'No, no!' I cried. 'Not that poison! You know I never touch it.'

'But, dearest, you are ill. You don't mean to say you refuse it even now?'

'More than ever now!' I cried. 'I know where it led her.'

CHAPTER XXII

AT SAINT-ANDRÉ

THE long night-journey across France to Dijon gave me abundance of time to consider my position. I dozed occasionally, it is true, propped up in one corner of the jolting carriage; but as every seat was fully occupied, after the fashion of the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée, much sleep was impossible. I gazed blankly out of the window now and again at bare stretches of dimly-lit hedgeless fields, interspersed with spectral rows of tall poplars fringing the long straight roads, and interrupted at times by the flashing red lights and pallid yellow gas-lamps of some country station, through which our train dashed, screaming, with phantasmagoric haste. Ghostly plains, threaded by dark rivers, which only the reflections of the stars revealed: parallel rows of lights seen from above as we shot through some town: black palls of woodland clinging to the hillsides. It was a weird journey—away from my home, my friends, my position, my prospects, all utterly left behind or destroyed or ruined, and on, on, on across the misty levels of that interminable dull plain with

its faintly twinkling lights towards the doubtful goal of my dead or dying Mother.

Should I reach her alive? that was the chief question that agitated me as we whirled through the solemn gloom. Should I be in time to see her fortified by the last rites of the Church, anointed with the holy oil, strengthened for her last journey by the consecrated wafer? I clasped my hands now and then and prayed to that Heaven in which John Stodmarsh had done his best to shake my wavering faith, that I might still be in time to soothe the last moments of the Mother I had never loved, the Mother whose injustice had driven me forth upon the world in untimely childhood.

For the most part, that terrible doubt—was she living? was she dead?—filled my mind to the exclusion of every other idea. But now and again, in the course of my vigil, too, I had time by snatches to reflect upon my relations with John Stodmarsh and my position in the future.

Amid the gloom and solitude of that night-ride—for though I was surrounded by fellow-travellers, I spoke to no one—light fell upon many things; I saw them more clearly in that outer darkness than I had seen them before. Especially it came home to me that my bargain with John Stodmarsh had been from the very beginning a false and a bad one. It was never binding. I was too young to know; for no one, boy or girl, can realise what these promises mean before the coming on of the Great Awakening. But more than that; even if I had made such a covenant

with my eyes open, as I made it with my eyes closed, it would have been wrong of me to fulfil it—untrue to myself, untrue to John, untrue above all to those that might afterward be born of us. You may call it unmaidenly to face that point; Miss Westmacott would have held it so; but I faced it none the less: for if one is born a woman, surely one holds the great and holy privilege of child-bearing in trust for humanity; and surely one must approach that God-given duty, reverently and devoutly indeed, but bravely and frankly too, with full consciousness of its meaning. I faced it so that night, and something within me or without me bore in upon me the truth that to unite oneself to a man whom one does not love is treason to oneself and to one's unborn babes—to unite oneself to a man whom one loves and trusts is a duty to oneself and to those who hereafter may call one Mother.

Like Constantine's cross in the sky, the truth flashed fiery on me. I saw that I had been misled by false ideals. This Juggernaut of *honour* toppled in its car. I was bound to John Stodmarsh—yes; but what was that formal obligation compared to the deeper and more primitive obligation to be true to myself, true to my own inmost ideals of purity, true to the instinct which bids us cleave to this man and reject that one—the instinct which tells for the good and improvement of humanity? My fetish disappeared. I had bowed down to it too long. To-night, I broke it.

All this flashed upon me, I say, from within . .

or from without. Perhaps it was the voice of nature and of reason; perhaps it was direct monition from the Powers that are above us. And perhaps it was both; for may not both be one?—may not the Voice that speaks from within be the echo implanted in us of the Word without? I prayed for light: was not light vouchsafed me?

John Stodmarsh's sense of dignity! Thank Heaven! John Stodmarsh's sense of dignity had taken care of itself. I had not rejected him; he had rejected me. He could go about and say, 'I meant to marry the girl, but fortunately, before I took that fatal step, she gravely disobeyed and displeased me. I have broken off the match, which was, after all, a most quixotic one. This waif of the highroad attracted me at first by the very oppositeness of her qualities to my own; I see now it is better for a man to marry in his own rank of life and among his own people.'

John Stodmarsh's money! Yes, I owed John Stodmarsh the expenses of my education. But, in a sense, that was all. Pounds sterling can be always repaid by pounds sterling. And I had none. But I could earn them. Mariana was earning large sums; Pactolus flowed in upon her: and though I had not Mariana's glorious soprano voice, yet I might say without vanity, I was cleverer than Mariana—more varied, more original. I made up my mind in the train as we whirled, snorting lurid steam in the glow of the engine, across the dimly star-lit uplands of Burgundy, that I would set to work at once when I

got back to London to earn my own living, and repay John Stodmarsh.

Then again, after all, his anger might be short-lived. When he saw I had disobeyed him and gone to my Mother, he might change his mind and wish to forgive me—wish still to marry me. In that case, what? Thank God for the light! I saw more clearly now; and I resolved, if that were so, to refuse him. As clearly as I had felt my debt to him before, just so clearly did I feel my debt to myself now—my debt to my own soul—and my debt to Dudu.

Self-sacrifice is not always one's highest duty. There are cases where it is even one's worst moral enemy.

We pulled up at Dijon in the grey dawn. Weary with a sleepless night, I hired a fiacre at once and drove out through white mists of morning to Saint-André. Frost was in the air. Yellow leaves fluttered down from the trees upon the roadway.

A gendarme directed me to the house where *la nommée Lupari* lay. She might be dead; or she might not. The administration had not yet heard news this morning. Nobody else stirred. Blue smoke just curled here and there from a cottage chimney.

I found the squalid house: I entered the wretched room, alone and trembling. I was chilled with my drive. My Mother lay on an ill-kept bed; I looked at her, holding my breath: she was still breathing. By her head knelt a sombre French priest with the holy elements. I was in time, then! I was in time! She opened her eyes and saw me.

'Have ye come, Mariana?' she asked in a feeble voice, but very excitedly. She stretched her wasted hand towards me. I took it in my own. 'No, not Mariana, Mother,' I answered. 'Mariana was detained by her engagements in London. But I have come in her place. You know me—Rosalba!'

She lifted herself in her bed with a convulsive gasp. Excitement seemed to choke her. 'An' is it Rosalba?' she cried, her face twitching with a stormy tumult of feeling. She shrank from me as she looked. 'Mariana has shtopped away; an' ye have come, Rosalba?'

'Yes, Mother,' I answered. 'I have come. I could not keep away from you. Lie down and calm yourself.'

The *curé* interposed. He was a tall, thin man with an ascetic face, made more gloomy by the long straight fall of his robes. It gave me a shudder to look at him. She is dying, *ma fille*,' he said. 'She needs the consolations of religion. Not a word to distract her!'

'Not a word, *mon père*,' I answered. 'I will not interrupt. Proceed with your office.'

'No, no!' my Mother cried, struggling hard to speak, though scarcely able to utter. 'I have something to confess. Something that I have kept hid from ye. I can't die wid it on me sowl. Rosalba, Rosalba! 'twas for the sake of that that I telegraphed to Mariana. Me child, me child——' she struggled hard to speak, but her words choked her. She fell back half insensible on the squalid pillow.

The priest looked across at me with surprised inquiry. 'You are her daughter, mademoiselle?'

I nodded a painful assent. 'Her daughter.'

He raised his eyebrows almost imperceptibly, but re-arranged his sacerdotal dress as if my answer did not astonish him. 'She has something on her mind,' he whispered. 'Something that troubles her greatly. She speaks little French, but I can gather so much. She has kept asking at intervals all day yesterday whether you had yet arrived. It seems to me she wanted to tell you something which she believed would be of great service to you or relieve your mind from a serious burden. For that, I have delayed administering *le bon dieu* to her.'

'I think,' I answered, 'it is more likely she wished to express regret for some part of her conduct. But that is needless now. If ever I have sustained any wrong at her hands, I forgive her freely. If ever I have wronged her, here, before God's presence and before you, *mon père*, I implore her forgiveness.'

She started up again at the words, and endeavoured to speak, but could not. She could only clasp my hand convulsively with a dying pressure.

Her eyes were growing glazy. 'There is no time to lose, father,' I said. 'If you mean to administer the last rites of the Church, you must at once administer them.'

'So I think, my daughter,' he answered. And, kneeling by her bed, he proceeded with the solemn office.

She did not speak again. But her face grew

calmer. We watched her till noon. Then her throat quivered a little; she opened her eyes once; her head fell back on the pillow.

'*C'est la mort*,' the priest murmured.

I felt my heart grow numb. After all, in life, one has but one Mother.

Yet though I was conscious of a stone in my breast, I could not weep. The tears refused to come. Nor could I bring myself to feel that I had lost anything. Forgive me, you gentle-nurtured English girls, who have not known what it is to have a Mother like mine. Grant me at least your pity.

I returned to Dijon late in the evening, after making the few small arrangements necessary for the funeral. I had left a note in London telling Auntie of my trouble, and asking her to lend me money for this last service, if Mariana refused to pay it.

The drive back was an eternity of terror. We passed through long ghostly avenues of gaunt black poplars: a chink of starless sky hardly showed through their summits. Yellow leaves still fell. The loneliness appalled me. And I must sleep by myself in that friendless city at the end of my drive—if it ever had an end. Still, the tears would not come. My eyes were hard balls: they burned internally.

After years of dark misery, I think, I alighted at the door of the Hôtel de la Cloche, where I had already engaged a room for that evening. The awful solitude of my position weighed upon me. I felt how civilisation had eaten into my heart of courage,

for I could not help contrasting my shrinking awe that night at Dijon with the blithe stroll I took across the Kentish downs (singing like Christian after he had lost his burden) on the morning when I sloughed off the First Murderer.

At the door of the Cloche—Arthur Wingham was waiting for me.

With a cry of wild joy, I stretched out both hands. I had forbidden him to come, and exacted a promise from him; but I will not pretend I was not delighted to see him. After the forlornness of that long day, it was happiness to behold a face one knew and loved —even though one had forbidden it.

Convention went to the winds. 'Dudu,' I cried. 'You here! And you promised not to follow me!'

'I promised not to follow you.—Why, my child, how cold! You're as blue as a plum!' He caught me up in his arms, as the roc caught Sindbad, and carried me into the square hall of the hotel. There he laid me down gently. 'Here she is, Linda: exonerate me!'

Auntie rose from a lounge, very pale but sweet, and kissed me twice on each cold cheek. 'Darling,' she said, 'I can read in your face what you have suffered. Blame this journey to my account. Arthur came to me at Cambridge and explained everything. I have taken it upon myself to brave your veto, and to bring him with me. I am chaperon enough for both. I promised him absolution. Rosalba dear, you absolve him?'

I kissed her twice in return. 'One for you,' I said,

clinging to her. 'And one—for him. Auntie dear, how good of you! This burden was more than I could bear alone. Dudu, dear Dudu—thanks—for breaking your promise.'

I was glad they had come, but—how sweet of them, too, to remain at Dijon instead of following me to Saint-André! For if they had *seen* her, I do not think I could have borne it.

I went upstairs with Auntie, flung myself on my bed, and cried, and cried, and cried, and cried. The tears came now. Auntie held my hand and said nothing.

Oh, the luxury of a good long cry! the delicious unrestrained wallowing misery of it! Poor men, I pity them! They must bottle up their feelings; they must let their grief or their indignation smoulder. But *we* can throw ourselves down, bury our faces in our pillows, and give ourselves up with absolute self-surrender to an orgy of tears, a wild revel of wretchedness.

The doubt of God's Providence smote me still. Why did God give me such a mother?

Kyrie eleison! Christe eleison! Kyrie eleison!

And yet, even God cannot make the past not have been.

She *was* my mother.

CHAPTER XXIII

A REVELATION

WE waited at Dijon to bury that poor corpse. It was a religious duty. The Italian peasant attaches grave importance to the last rites of death; and in that matter I am still an Italian peasant. Antigone-like, I felt I must bury my dead, at whatever hazard.

It was a strange and lonely little ceremony—just Auntie, Arthur, the sombre priest, and myself; and we returned home silently to the Hôtel de la Cloche from the cemetery at Saint-André. How grateful I felt to my two dears for standing by me in this trouble I cannot put into words. To have performed that last office alone with the priest would have been more than a girl of twenty-one could easily compass.

May she rest in peace! If prayers for a troubled soul avail, she has mine daily.

Next morning, we set out on our return journey to England. England, dear England, have I railed at you at times? How I loved you that day, when I felt myself so far from you!

Two lands in Europe twine their tendrils ever deeper round one's heart—Italy and England.

Auntie had telegraphed the hour of our expected

arrival to her servants at the flat. When we reached home, tired and dusty, with Arthur in our train, I was astonished to find Mariana (in an amazing hat) waiting for us.

She kissed me, somewhat frigidly, under the shadow of the vast brim; but still, she kissed me. Mouse-like and demure as ever, with her soft dimpled chin enveloped in lavender gossamer, she was yet big with some strange news. She suppressed it with difficulty till she had asked a few decent conventional questions. 'Dead! Yes; I knew; it was telegraphed to the papers. And *you* attended her funeral! I must explain that away. However, thank goodness, it is all right now. I have taken this matter in hand. I have explained away everything.'

'But to what do I owe this honour?' I asked, somewhat angrily; it would have been more becoming in Mariana, I thought, after shirking her plain duty, to have kept to her first resolution of ignoring me. 'You know, you were never going to speak to me again.'

'*Si, si*: I know,' Mariana answered with an angelic smile. 'I did not mean to speak to you—if you had wrecked my ship. However, it is quite unimportant now. I have found that woman out. I have manœuvred the papers. I am arranging everything.'

I sank on the sofa, very pale and faint. Auntie supported me on her arm. 'You *must* have a glass of wine,' she cried. 'Arthur, run for the decanters! Pour her out some port. Or no, bring champagne;

that is the best pick-me-up. It will restore her faster.'

Dudu rushed off to get it, and began unwiring the cork. I took no notice, but waved the poisonous stuff away with one hand. 'What does this mean, Mariana? Do please be explicit!'

Mariana made no reply, but nodding her ostrich feathers with a triumphant air, handed me over a newspaper cutting.

It was a letter to the editor. 'SIR,—I see that in the telegrams relating to the recent atrocious crime at Saint-André the name of one of the sufferers is given as Signora Lupari, and she is described as my mother. I desire to state in the most emphatic way that there is absolutely no truth in this report, and that the woman in question is not related to me.—Faithfully yours, MARIANA LUPARI.'

I handed it back to her with an indignant shudder. 'But, Mariana, it is not true!'

'It *is* true, every word of it. . . . Though, of course, when I wrote that letter, I thought it wasn't.'

'True? What do you mean?' The room whirled and staggered.

'She was *not* our Mother. Oh yes—'tis the fact: you need not stare like that. I am not mad. I am telling you the plain truth. A reporter from the *Daily Monitor* has hunted it all up, and egged out the documents. I'll tell you how it happened.' She leaned back on the ottoman and prepared to deliver her news, looking winning as ever. 'He came to

interview me after my letter to the papers—they *will* come to interview one: 'tis one of our drawbacks. Of course, I stuck to my story—tell a lie and stick to it'—she beamed and smiled in her filmy little wraps, all crépon and gossamer. 'He insisted. I denied. He asked proofs. *E via, e via.* To get rid of him, I sent him off at a venture to the Italian church in Hatton Garden. Well, he went, and what do you suppose he found?'—she handed me some copies of documents from the register of the church and from the registrar's office. I read them through, reeling. They were . . . the marriage certificate of Antonio Lupari and Chiara Lanzi; the certificates of birth and baptism of their two children, Mariana and Rosalba; the certificate of death of Chiara, wife of Antonio Lupari; and the certificate of the marriage of Antonio Lupari, widower, with Bridget Mahoney, spinster, six weeks after the death of his first wife, our Mother.

'These are all true,' I asked, suspiciously.

Mariana, who had been occupied meanwhile in sucking the tortoise-shell ball in the eagle's claw, handed them across to Arthur for examination. 'True copies,' she cooed back in her dove-like voice. 'Officially certified.'

'But why did Father never tell us?' I cried.

Mariana extended her pretty gloved hands before her, to show the palms, with an Italian gesture. 'How should I know?' she rippled on, raising her dark lashes and lifting her languorous eyes to heaven. 'Perhaps, procrastinator, he kept putting it off from

time to time. Perhaps, prevaricator, he was ashamed. Perhaps, unfeeling, he thought we might find out he had married that woman only six weeks after the death of our Mother.'

'And our real Mother?' I gasped out.

Mariana rearranged her coquettish red neckerchief —fluffy crimson silk gauze tied loose round the throat—with very deliberate fingers. 'I have been to the Italian church myself,' she said in her bell-clear accents, still toying with the neckerchief, 'where I have seen and conferred with old Padre Marchesi. He remembers our Mother—a very good and devout woman, he says, "*Una bellissima signora: un' anima veramente divota!*"—and also a most graceful dancer. She had a taste for poetry, too; do you recollect an old Dante, dear, and a tattered Shakespeare that we had knocking about on the Monti Berici?——'

Did I remember them, indeed? Did I remember the treasured delights of my childhood? '*Si, si,*' I cried. '*Mi ricordo.*'

'Well, I think they must have been hers,' Mariana went on, withdrawing one fawn-coloured glove to finger a pet sapphire. 'And I have no doubt it was from her that I Myself have inherited my artistic temperament.' Mariana looked down at her No. 3 boots, very neatly laced, and let the long satin eyelashes fringe the downcast eyes with becoming modesty.

'But *She*—the other one—she was not our Mother!' I exclaimed, my heart rising tumultuously.

'No,' Mariana answered. 'She was not. So if

only I had known sooner, you might have been spared a long journey. I have no doubt it must have been an annoying and troublesome bit of business.'

'It would have made no difference to me,' I answered. 'I should have gone all the same.' One cannot get rid of ingrained beliefs and ideas in a moment. I thought she was my Mother; I felt she was my Mother; unkind to me, unjust to me—but still, my Mother. I should have gone to see her die; I should have gone to bury her.

'How pale and flurried you look!' Mariana broke in, on a clear, low note. 'Mrs. Mallory, she is fainting!'

I staggered over to the table, and took the bottle from Dudu's hands. Then I poured myself out a good glass of champagne, raised it aloft, and drank it. It was the first wine that had passed my lips since the night when I solemnly renounced it as a child on the Monti Berici.

Auntie drew back, a little surprised, for she knew my repugnance. There was questioning in her glance. 'I am not afraid of it now,' I answered, smiling, for the champagne put fresh force into me. 'If I am not *her* child, thank God, I have no cause to be afraid of it.'

'You need it,' Auntie answered, laying her cheek against mine. 'This is a great revulsion.'

'Auntie,' I said, nestling towards her, 'do you remember, I told you at Dijon she died evidently anxious to tell me something? It was *that*, I feel

sure. She tried to speak, but had not strength to frame it.'

'Well, I have made it all right, anyhow,' Mariana cooed on in her calm sweet voice, unperturbed as usual. 'The reporter brought me these things, and I beamed on him when I had read them, "You see, I told you so!" I did not let him guess what a discovery he had made and how great a surprise it was to me. I kept my countenance like a sphinx, and merely said, "You see, I told you so! Now, you can publish these facts—it will show your enterprise. You can describe how you hunted up the family records, and how you found I was right; my mother died just twenty-one years ago, in giving birth to my sister Rosalba. It is all perfectly clear; you can print your evidence. Only, I offer you a ten pound note—first and only offer—no advance entertained—if you consent to suppress the certificate of the second marriage. *You* having hunted the matter up, no other reporter will think of checking it. Ten pounds—ready cash; no second bid; is it a bargain?" And he took it like a shot. Here's the report, as you see. It disposes once for all of that ridiculous rumour.' Mariana fanned herself.

I read it, dazed. It mentioned the facts of Antonio Lupari's marriage, the births of his children, and the date and certificate of his wife's death. 'Miss Rosalba Lupari, the prima donna's sister, has gone to Dijon,' the paragraph continued, 'to represent the family at the funeral of the victim of the recent outrage, who was the widow of a certain Signor Lupari, belonging

to a village near Vicenza. The lady in question was connected by marriage only with the well-known singer.' It was the literal truth—but the truth, severely edited. Mariana smiled with conscious pride and self-approval. She had saved us both, she considered, by a well-worded paragraph, from an atrocious scandal.

'But why have you kept us in the dark so long?' you ask. 'Why have you deluded us into the belief that you were the daughter of a drunken mother? You have harrowed our feelings for nothing, and alienated our sympathies. Why could you not have hinted as much from the beginning? Why could you not have allowed us to guess for ourselves that you were not her child?'

Simply because to have done so would have been psychologically untrue—a violation of my Method. I did not know the truth myself till that moment; had I let you gather it too soon, I would have given you a false sense of my position. But deeper than even that artistic need is this feeling to me—that I could recognise then and ever afterward how instinct had half told me this secret beforehand. I always loved and revered my Father; I always felt I was far more his child than that grotesque Irishwoman's. Whether it was nature speaking to me or not, I know not; but even when I thought her and called her my Mother, I never regarded her in the same light as I regarded my Father. She was not near enough.

Had she been flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood, could I have felt such a repugnance to her? Would it have been in me to feel it? I doubt it.

But I fell on my knees in my own room that night and thanked heaven fervently for a great cloud lifted.

CHAPTER XXIV

A TRANSFERENCE OF FEELING

IN the morning, before office hours, John called round to see me. I was not quite dressed, but I tidied myself up a bit, and hurried out to him, looking a perfect fright, I don't doubt, uncomfortable and awkward. I felt hot in the face: my fingers twitched nervously. John, for his part, was austere and rigid; polite, in his close-shaven way, but ostentatiously forgiving. 'I have to condole with you on your loss, Rosalba,' he said, holding his glossy silk hat in his hand before him as if to mark the casual nature of his visit. 'Though I understand, of course, how many circumstances mitigate it. In fact, I suppose we may venture to admit that this is one of those cases where condolence need not surpass the limits of a decent observance.'

'The loss touches me even less than you might imagine, John,' I answered. And I went on to explain to him how Mariana and the reporter had made a joint discovery.

John just raised his faintly pencilled eyebrows, which were colourless, like so much of him: the thin

lips grew thinner. Then he examined the newspaper cuttings one by one, and scanned the copies of the certificates closely. 'These would seem to be in order,' he murmured, 'quite in order. And that being so, my dear child, I venture to say it is all the more to be regretted that you chose to run counter to my expressed wishes and expose yourself to so serious a loss in life—all for the sake of a wretched woman who turns out, after all, to have been wholly unrelated to you!'

'I did what I thought my duty,' I replied stoutly.

'Views of duty differ. They differ—fundamentally. However, I do not wish to enlarge upon that debatable subject. I am no longer your guardian. Day before yesterday, you may recollect, you attained your twenty-first birthday.'

In the turmoil of those times I had quite overlooked it.

'I come now,' John continued, a little uneasily, in his civil, mechanical voice, 'at this unaccustomed hour, to discuss your future. When you started for Dijon, you clearly understood, I believe, the seriousness, the irrevocability of the step you were taking. I explained it in full to you.'

'You did, John; and I accepted your intimation.'

'You realise, then, that our engagement is at an end?'

'I realise it altogether. I acquiesce in your decision. Our compact, I think, was an error from the first; this episode has supplied us with a convenient occasion for retreating from what was for

both of us an untenable position.' Somehow, one could not talk long to John without dropping by degrees into his official manner.

He looked pleased at my submissiveness. The corners of his rigid mouth relaxed. 'I am glad you recognise that,' he said, twisting a button. 'It was, as you say, an error for both of us. I regard it as a mistake for a man to marry out of that circle in life —you understand my meaning. I regard it as a mistake for a woman to attempt to rise, or to be artificially raised, above that class for which nature intended her. I had seen this for long; but the sense that I was indebted to you—had put myself under an implied obligation to marry you, by educating you above your natural level—prevented me from endeavouring to break off what I was beginning to consider a one-sided arrangement.'

'Very one-sided,' I gasped, for the first time realising that while I had been bent on sacrificing myself on John's account, John had been bent on sacrificing himself on mine. 'Continue. I follow you.' I dropped once more into his stilted manner.

'You are good enough to acquiesce. That renders my task easier.' He crossed his legs, and gazed fixedly at his yellow-striped socks. 'You will understand that after what has happened, our marriage becomes impossible. You chose—I will not say to disobey me, for you are no longer my ward, and I speak to you now as adult to adult—but to disregard my strongly expressed wishes. Considering what I have done for you, I look upon that conduct as

equivalent to breaking off our engagement. It *is* broken off. Is that understood between us?'

'Absolutely,' I answered, quivering, and biting my lip hard. John saw me and misunderstood; I think he thought I was suffering acutely from disappointed ambition. I have remarked that he is a man who lacks emotional subtlety.

'That is well,' he went on, trying his best to let me down gently. 'I am glad that you recognise it. But, at the same time, Rosalba, I want you to understand that I am not angry with you. Not angry; do not let us dissolve this engagement in anger. We part good friends—so far as we part—do we not?'

'John,' I said, taking his hand, 'you have always been kindness and generosity itself to me. How could I part as anything but a friend from any one who had shown me such unvariable goodness?'

'Thank you, Rosalba,' he replied, clearing his throat. 'I rejoice to find my action is not misunderstood. But we could not be happy together in married life; and recognising that fact, it is lucky that we recognise it before, not after marriage.—Now, as to your future, my dear girl. I have incurred obligations towards you, I admit, by raising you into a station in life for which you were not—er—originally fitted. In doing this, I may have done right, or I may have done wrong; but, at any rate, I have done it, and I must take the consequences. I take them gladly. I am not going to marry you; but as that will throw you on your own resources without a means of livelihood'—unflinching rectitude

accentuated his chin—'I propose to make you an allowance of . . . a hundred and fifty a year as long as you remain unmarried.'

'John,' I exclaimed, taken aback at his real munificence, 'that is too kind, too generous of you! I have no right at all to expect anything of the sort, and I cannot——'

'My dear Rosalba,' he answered, brightening up and glowing with kindliness, 'it is the merest justice. Anything else would be wrong of me. I educate you for a special purpose which you cannot fulfil. By your own act, first, but by mutual consent afterwards, our bargain is rescinded. That closes the account, on the score of marriage. But that score is not all. There still remains the fact that I have educated you for a post in life which incapacitates you from returning to your primitive condition. You have now no natural place in the world. You *might* go out as a governess. You *might* take one of the clerkly posts, as secretary, librarian, or so forth, now so frequently—and so wisely—thrown open to women. You *might* marry. With your opportunities at Linda's and your excellent education, chances of marriage still lie open before you. But all those are contingencies. I am bound to atone for my original error. I therefore propose to allow you, as I said, a hundred and fifty a year, while you remain unmarried.'

I rose, very flushed. 'John,' I said, faltering, 'you misunderstand. I am a proud woman. You misconceive my nature. I owe you a great deal. I owe

you in one sense more than I can ever repay you. You have been extremely good to me: you have behaved to me with kindness which I shall always remember. But, in another sense, I owe you directly all that you have expended on my education, and . . . I mean to repay it.'

'My dear child, how can you? Do not talk chimerically. You have no money, and I fear you do not realise how hard it is to earn any.'

'Mariana can earn it,' I answered; 'and so can I.'

'Nature endowed Mariana with a splendid artistic gift—her voice; and she has seconded it by a technical training in music.'

'I waive that question,' I went on. 'Let that stand over. I owe you this money, and I mean to repay it. I mean to repay it, to the very last farthing. But let us leave it aside for the present. I will only speak now about this unexpected offer of yours. Believe me, I appreciate the reasons that lead you to make it—your sense of justice, your instinct of generosity. But I must absolutely decline it. I shall earn my own living—of that I am not afraid—and I shall earn enough to repay you in full. Therefore, from my heart I thank you for this as for all your past kindness; but I distinctly, definitely, and finally refuse to avail myself of your thoughtful munificence.'

He gazed at me uneasily. 'I hope,' he interposed, 'you don't say this under the impression that . . . that by your future conduct you may perhaps induce me to rescind my determination. I ought to tell

you plainly that our engagement is broken off, once for all, and will not be renewed.'

I drew back as if he had stung me. 'John,' I cried, with a sudden revulsion, 'you insult me!'

He saw he had gone too far, and he was profusely apologetic. 'But in order that there may be no mistake,' he went on, in his Grandisonian way, though evidently awkward, 'I . . . I think I ought to apprise you at once of a slight event which took place during your absence from England. I believe . . . I may say I believe . . . in the policy of striking while the iron is hot.' He sat uneasily. Crossed his legs. Uncrossed them. Fingered his hat. Fumbled about through several unimportant sentences. At last, plunged and said it. 'I had long come to the conclusion, Rosalba, that you and I were not naturally adapted for one another. I had long admired the classical beauty and the trained intellect of another lady. But honour intervened. I had given you my word and would not retract it. When you quitted me, in opposition to my expressed wishes, however, I felt that honour need intervene no longer. I asked —and obtained——' He plunged once more. 'I am engaged to be married; this time the ceremony is to take place at once—as soon, that is to say, as the necessary arrangements can be completed—such arrangements as are needful for a lady in my future wife's position.' He made a rhetorical pause. 'I am about to marry . . . Miss Gwendoline Duddleswell —I need hardly say, the daughter of a Cabinet Minister.'

I seized both his hands with sincere delight. If only he knew what a load he had taken off my mind! I felt as Isaac must have felt when the ram, caught by the horns in the thicket, appeared to Abraham. 'John,' I cried in a voice whose heartiness was too unfeigned for any doubt to exist as to its genuine character, 'I *am* so glad! Miss Duddleswell! I congratulate you!'

He bloomed into geniality. 'Thank you, Rosalba,' he answered, wringing my hand in return. 'It is nice of you to receive this news in so friendly a spirit.'

'John,' I exclaimed with conviction, as the fitness of the substitution dawned by degrees upon me, 'she is the very wife for you! You could not have selected better. Your chosen bride is a lady; she is educated; she is intellectual; she is extremely well-read; she interests herself in your problems; she sympathises with your aims; she moves in your own circle. If I had been asked to choose out of all the world the exact help that was meet for you, I think I should have said, "Why, Gwendoline Duddleswell!" In the wise provision of Providence, she was made for you.'

He was really charmed. He shook my hand once more. 'Rosalba,' he cried, unbending, 'this only shows me again what I knew long ago, that in spite of much flightiness of speech and manner, your judgment is excellent and your heart sound to the core. You are totally free from the faintest tinge of petty feminine or feline jealousy.'

'I hope so!' I answered.

'And remember,' smoothing his hat, and pulling on one glove, 'if ever you want that hundred and fifty——'

I accompanied him to the door. 'Dear John!' I answered, 'you are most good and kind. I know you mean it well. But for my sake, I implore you, never allude again to that unhappy offer. 'Tis generosity itself—but, it grates like a discord.'

Auntie said to me later, 'Rosalba, 'tis a slight upon you! He might at least have waited, for decency's sake, another week or two, before announcing his engagement.'

'Oh no, dearie!' I cried. 'That is just John's nature. He has a need for affections: diluted, milk-and-watery affections, but still affections. They saturate an affinity. One object being withdrawn, he immediately requires another on which to fix them. When one canary in a cage dies, its mate mourns — till you introduce a fresh companion. Then it perks up again and is happy. John is at the canary stage of the tender emotions.'

CHAPTER XXV

I TEST MY MARKET VALUE

I HAD to earn my living.

I faced the situation, like a man—or at least, like a woman.

Auntie pressed me hard to marry Dudu at once. To this course, I saw one fatal objection—Dudu had not asked me. Besides, I could not marry him. I owed John Stodmarsh too much: and I meant to repay him. I would decide on nothing which did not enable me to earn my own livelihood and leave a surplus sufficient to save up for that repayment. Otherwise, it would have been beyond doubt a most suitable match; for we had neither of us a penny.

I turned things over in my mind this way and that during those days at Auntie's. I was further off from earning money now than in the dim past years when I danced and played on dusty French highways. How the sous rolled in! Day by day it dawned upon me more and more clearly that Miss Westmacott's 'toning down' had been a fatal error. My chance in life lay not in 'toning down' but in tuning up; I ought to have developed my natural talents (if any) along my natural lines. Nature had

endowed me with certain gifts of sprightliness and mimicry which I loved to exercise; John Stodmarsh and Miss Westmacott had conspired to dwarf them.

But they had not wholly succeeded. They tried a task beyond their strength. Turned out at the door, art came back by the window. Clandestinely and surreptitiously I had gone on playing my little plays before the girls and delivering my speeches. Auntie and Dudu had encouraged me in the holidays. I loved dressing up; I loved attitudinising. John did not care for me to go to the theatre; he said it 'tended to unsettle me'; like all his kind, John had always a stange dread of that mysterious entity, unsettlement. But Auntie took me to the play from time to time; it was an epoch in my life when first I saw a real Juliet in a real balcony, and beheld a Romeo in trunk hose actually climbing up a real pasteboard wall to embrace her. I went away very much 'unsettled.' I pined to play Juliet to crowded houses off-hand. For when a girl says she 'wants to go on the stage,' she does not mean she wants to begin, as begin she must, in the *rôle* of walking lady; she means she wants to begin as Mrs. Siddons in Lady Macbeth, or as Sarah Bernhardt in La Tosca.

The theatre was my first love. Had I not evolved it for myself, 'antecedently of experience,' as the psychology-books say, from a tattered Shakespeare on the Monti Berici? But I did not now contemplate going on the stage, for all that. I had reasons for this resolve; among them, one was that preparation for the stage costs time and money. Now I

wanted to economise time, because I wanted to begin repaying John Stodmarsh that I owed him. And I had no money. So, on various grounds, I rejected the theatre.

But on the very morning after my interview with John, and the decided snapping of that unlucky engagement, I went out by myself—in search of another. I had a scheme in my mind. It may have been a foolish one; but, at any rate, it amused me. To be amused is surely a great point in this dull world, where so many adverse forces—social, religious, pecuniary—seem banded together in one solid phalanx to prevent our enjoying ourselves.

I took a bus into the Strand—or rather, two successive bi, if that is the proper plural—and went to call on a famous music-hall proprietor.

'A music-hall!' you cry. 'Oh, this is really too much! The moment she escapes from that excellent Mr. Stodmarsh's restraining influence, what appalling developments may we not expect from this Bohemian young woman?'

Wait till you hear. 'Tis a lesson this book is bent on impressing upon you.

Mr. Henry Burminster is a very famous man. He has controlled in his time half the music-halls of London. He is short, fat, more than middle-aged, somewhat unctuous. Not red-faced: a worse type, white and flabby, with parboiled cheeks: a sated sensualist. Innumerable crow's-feet pucker the corners of his deep-set eyes; the eyes themselves twinkle with humour, but convey strange undertones

of shrewdness, of worldly wisdom, of hard, business-like cruelty. The sort of man to enjoy a good dinner and run a show which uses up its 'artistes'—that is the accepted word—with ruthless rapidity. Each takes his 'turn'; and after a few 'turns,' his vogue is over. Mr. Burminster uses them up as omnibus-companies use horses; and when they are done for, no doubt ships them over to Antwerp to be slaughtered.

His Obesity received me at once in a cosy little study, half smoking-room, half office, with just a tinge of boudoir. Its odour vacillated between Turkish cigarettes and patchouli. He had received my card; but I do not think 'twas that that secured me admission: the door-keeper, I fancy, had been pleased to be gracious as to my external fitness for the musical profession. (I call it musical by courtesy, not knowing the appropriate adjective for music-hall.) Mr. Burminster leaned back in a capacious desk-chair, which (at some risk to itself) revolved on a pivot with his bulky person. His waist was convexity; an obtrusive diamond accentuated his fat fingers. He stared at me frankly; but there was nothing rude in his stare: to a great contractor in human flesh and blood a singer or a dancer is just so much stock-in-trade: he examines her points, not as person, but as saleable commodity. 'Will she or will she not suit my public?'—that is the question. Of women as women he has seen more than enough: they do not interest him. Mr. Burminster had declined on dinners, wine, and Carlsbad.

I felt as much in the scrutinising glance with which he ran me up and down, and did not resent it.

'In the profession?' he asked at last, in a fat cracked voice, as unctuous as the face of him.

'Not yet. I may be.'

'You may be? So? What qualifications, young lady?'

'Innocence first,' I answered, taking my cue from his style. 'That, you see, is a novelty.'

The crow's-feet puckered still closer; the corners of the mouth twitched with a curious motion. 'That —is—true,' His Obesity mused slowly. 'So far—good. And next, combined with it?'

'Audacity. A rare combination!'

'Right again. You hit it in one. Anything else?'

'Mimicry.'

The swinging chair swung round. The dispenser of wealth surveyed me once more from hat to shoe with a most purchasing stare. 'You put it short,' he commented. 'You do not waste words. Most young women who come here on hire bore one with the exuberance of their voluble self-assertion. They have all the virtues—as understood on the music-hall stage—and they expatiate on them like Hamlet soliloquising. Innocence — audacity — mimicry. Well, well. Experience?'

'None,' I answered. 'In its place, freshness originality, utter freedom from convention.

'Trained?'

'Self-trained. Taught myself to act, tramping the highroads of France and Italy.'

'So. Educated on the Continent!'

'*And* at a High School for girls in Hampstead.'

'Aha! A new woman!'

'Do I look like an old one?'

He pursed his lips, set his teeth, or at least his jaws, half closed the sleepy shifty fat eyes, and once more took stock of me. 'My time is valuable,' he said at last, plagiarising Alice. 'A hundred pounds a minute.'

'That is why I came to *you*,' I answered. 'I knew I had it in my power to offer you a good thing; and the man with capital is the man to put a good thing on the market.' I said it with the emphatic, jerky, convinced air of men in the City, whom I had often heard talk about something called Founders' Shares at Auntie's and Sir Hugh Tachbrook's.

'That's good!' he broke in, waking up. 'Any more like it?'

'Plenty more where that cum from,' I answered, transforming myself at once into the person of a bus-conductor. 'Now then, old 'un, git on!—Off side down, Bill!—'Ere y' are, mum! Westmin-ister!'

'Ha! quick-change *artiste*, without the costume,' he exclaimed, catching at it. His crafty eyes gave a twinkle which said as clear as words, 'There may be money in her. Investigate, but don't let her think you think so.' He grew sleepier than ever, and lighted a lazy cigarette. 'Let me see what you can

do,' he drawled out, glancing at the heavy watch on his desk. 'I have ten minutes I can spare. I assign you ten minutes.'

'One thousand pounds' worth of that valuable time!' I cried. 'Can't you let me have it in money?'

He smiled a restrained smile. 'Go on! go on! No tomfoolery!'

I went on, suppressing the tomfoolery as requested. I gave him in quick succession several of my little dramatic impersonations, as I had given them often before with great applause to the girls at school or to Auntie and Dudu. I passed from one sketch to the other hastily, without note or comment. Some of my 'turns' were monologues; others, battles of repartee between two contrasted speakers. Mr. Burminster leaned back torpid in his chair and pretended to close his eyes; but I knew through the eyelids—for he had no lashes—he was watching me, cat-like. At last His Obesity rose with an effort and opened the door. 'Mr. Weldon, come in and hear this young lady.'

'Another thousand!' I murmured. 'You see, I was right. *Et pi-ti-ti, et pa-ta-ta!* I told you this was money.'

He looked a little annoyed. 'Proceed,' he said, waving one fat unimpressive hand. 'Weldon, observe her.'

Mr. Weldon, who was a foxy man with thin upright red hair standing off from his forehead at an obtuse angle, did as he was bid and observed me.

My devil was well in hand that morning. I put him through his paces, and he positively astonished me by the quickness and variety of his fantastic sallies. He japed and grinned; he imitated to the life; he made foxy Mr. Weldon laugh aloud in spite of himself. I grew wild with my own fun. I broke out in full flood like the Adda when it has burst its banks. I finished, flushed. 'Whaur's yer Wullie Shakespeare noo?' I cried as I ended, striking an attitude of triumph based on a Highland fling.

The manager checked the silent twitching of his mouth. 'Very excellent fooling,' he admitted in a tolerant tone.

'Which is the commodity you purvey,' I answered, beaming on him.

Then both principals drew aside for a moment and conferred. I could see Mr. Burminster was for offering me a very small salary to begin with, while Mr. Weldon was for securing me by a larger bribe.

At last, His Obesity came forward with an insinuating look. 'These are funny sketches,' he admitted grudgingly. 'Very funny. I believe you have talent for the music-hall stage. But in our profession it is impossible to judge beforehand how the public will take anything. You may be a dead loss. Will you go on and try—for six weeks—at five guineas?'

'Five guineas a week?' I asked in a tone of withering contempt.

'Five guineas a week; three turns at three of my halls each evening.'

'Six weeks? Why six weeks for trial? *One* would surely be enough. I will negotiate for one week. But if you want to bind me down in advance for six, that shows you must think there is something in me.'

He blinked uneasily, then glanced sideways with his crafty eyes at ferret-faced Weldon. 'Knows a thing or two,' he muttered. 'Innocence?—well, ahem, good imitation, I call it.'

'I am perfectly ready to treat with you,' I went on, in my most business-like voice, 'upon the basis of a six weeks' agreement, if that is what you would like. But I shall understand then that you consider me a sufficiently safe draw to be worth risking your money upon.'

He opened the sleepy shifty fat eyes wide. 'What? never been on the stage before?' he cried. 'Well, for a new hand, you seem to know a precious lot about it.'

'General knowledge,' I answered carelessly—'and business instinct.'

'You put a name to it. I should say so.—Then we will make an agreement for six weeks at five guineas?'

'Oh dear no!' I answered, feeling sure from his manner I was worth more than that. 'I said, I would *treat* with you on the basis of a six weeks' agreement. The term is now fixed. We have next to consider the amount of salary. I had thought, twenty guineas.'

'Twenty guineas! An untried hand! *Do* you want to ruin me?'

I looked His Obesity straight in the unctuous face. 'Mr. Burminster,' I said, 'you are an old and tried caterer for the public taste. You and your partner have heard me for twenty minutes—more or less—and are anxious to engage me for six weeks certain. Now I am not a fool. I have held private audiences convulsed with laughter. I held your partner just now: I held yourself, though you laughed internally with your mouth hardly wrinkling. You wouldn't want me so much unless there were money to be made of me. I propose to make some part of that money myself. *You* have capital and command of houses; *I* have not. *You* pocket your share; *I* want mine. I ask twenty guineas. Take it, or leave it.'

He hesitated a moment. 'I leave it,' he answered.

'Thank you,' I said, rising to go. 'That is clear and categorical. I will not detain you. I am sorry to have wasted two thousand pounds' worth of your valuable time. Good morning!'

He rose hastily in turn and intercepted me with his huge girth on my way to the door. 'Look here!' he cried with an amount of eagerness that betrayed him. 'Where are you going?'

'To Kettlebury, of course!' He was the rival manager.

'To Kettlebury? That will never do. Stop, miss! Wait a moment!'

'No thank you,' I answered. 'You were clear—and categorical.'

He blocked the doorway. 'Oh, but I say, this is forcing a man's hand. Not Kettlebury—*if* you please. *Is* Kettlebury the sort of person to whom a lady who respects herself——'

'Mr. Kettlebury saw me a year ago at a children's entertainment in the East End got up by my aunt, and it was *his* encouragement——'

'What, Kettlebury has seen you?'

I bowed acquiescence.

'Just sit down there again! We will discuss this matter.'

'You let Cissie Lloyd slip through your fingers,' ferret-faced Mr. Weldon remarked aside, with a warning look, running one freckled hand through his foxy hair. 'Don't you do it again!' Cissie Lloyd was an *ingénue* who had burst like a meteor on the music-hall horizon, and blazed for a season—and Kettlebury had secured her.

The manager took up a pen. 'What is your name, young lady? Oh, here, on your card. I didn't even look at it. Lupari—Lupari? Any relation to *the* Lupari?'

'In a way. Her sister.'

'So ho! And the name ready made!—Weldon, how's that?—Well, now let us be business-like——'

'*I* was business-like before.'

'Perhaps. But I wasn't. We will be more explicit.' He leaned back in his chair, and folded his

fat hands, thumbs and fingers together. 'Young lady, you have talent.'

I dropped a saucy curtsey.

'Do that again,' he cried, starting. I did it again. He bit his pen and watched me.

'Talent. Yes, talent. I do not know its money value: trust me; believe me; I really do not. But I think it may be great. In our profession that is the most one can ever say. It is wild to plunge. We depend upon the public. And the public is a Hass. That is the bane of music-hall managership.'

'The bane agrees with you,' I murmured. 'You seem to thrive upon it. I think you must have tastes in common with the public.'

He eyed me craftily, sideways, like a parrot. It was such an oblique compliment. But after deliberation, he decided to put the best construction upon it. 'Yes, that is true,' he answered. 'I have an eye, I admit it. You satisfy my eye. Therefore—it is possible you may satisfy the public.'

We discussed the case at some length—occupying I dare not say how many thousands of pounds' worth of that priceless commodity, Mr. Burminster's time; and in the end, we arrived at a temporary agreement. Mr. Burminster, protesting much, and eager to escape ruin, contracted at last to engage me, if I chose to go on the stage, for six weeks certain, at a salary of twenty guineas a week—'though 'tis gambling, gambling.' At the end of that six weeks, should the gamble succeed, he was to have an option of re-engaging me for another six weeks at a salary

of fifty guineas. I insisted on the fifty; I believed I would be worth it. He fought hard for thirty; I turned the Kettlebury screw once more: it succeeded. After that again he equally insisted on a clause that if any other manager made me an offer of a still higher salary, he was to have the option of equalling it and retaining my services. All this was conditional upon my going on the music-hall stage at all. And for this I had a reason. On my side, I bargained that *if* I went on the stage, it would be under Mr. Burminster's management, and on these conditions. That was all we both wanted. Mr. Burminster desired to secure me as against that man Kettlebury. I desired an agreement on paper guaranteeing me these terms—for a particular purpose.

Valuable consideration passed—a crisp five-pound note. I crumpled it in my hand as if it were waste-paper.

His Obesity went down to the door with me in person. He saw me out deferentially. 'Shall I send for a hansom?' he asked, his fat fingers dwelling on the door-handle.

'Oh no, thank you,' I answered, with one of Mariana's sweet smiles. 'I'm not going far. Only to Somerset House.'

'Somerset House! What for?'

'Why, to get your agreement stamped, of course.' And I gave him the confiding glance of a four-year-old child.

He opened the sleepy shifty fat eyes wider than

was possible. 'Innocence! Innocence!' he murmured with bitter sarcasm. 'And she looks as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth! A playful schoolgirl! "Somerset House, to get your agreement stamped"—with a bland and child-like smile. Ought to bring the house down! "Innocence," quotha, "Innocence!"'

CHAPTER XXVI

I COME TO ANCHOR

I HAD got my agreement. I proceeded to make use of it. I wanted it for its effect upon three people.

From Somerset House I drove straight (by omnibus) to Mariana's.

Mariana, ever soft and peach-like, was seated in her snuggery, as she called it, her attention being entirely concentrated on certain alterations in a dainty flowery brocaded dressing-gown which her French maid was arranging for her. 'Twas a sweetly pretty brocade—sprays of pink roses on a delicate elusive honey-coloured ground; and Mariana, who loved the pomp of steward and seneschal, was justly proud of it. 'Bravissima!' she cried. 'C'est charmant!'

I burst in upon her, in a short serge skirt, big with my agreement, but anxious to look at first as if nothing out of the common had happened. Mariana, graciously smiling and extending one plump hand —Mariana's white hands have inspired sonnets— languidly inquired how I did—and whether I had seen the criticism of her Marguerite in last night's *St. James's*. I replied that I had not. She selected it

out for me from a copious bundle of press cuttings, on flimsy pink slips; there were at least a round dozen of them:—'Signora Lupari's remarkable impersonation'; 'Signora Lupari's unequalled organ'; 'her childish grace'; 'her delicious singing'; 'a Marguerite as guileless as Goethe drew her.' I ran my eye over it with a sense of sickening. 'That must be the great pitfall of these press-cutting agencies,' I ventured to remark. 'So bad for one's vanity! A man . . . or a woman must see all that the newspapers are saying about herself, without equally seeing what the newspapers are saying about other people. Which, of course, must tend to give one a false impression of one's own relative importance.'

'But the criticisms are so often hostile,' Mariana lisped out in her softly infantile voice—Mariana's childishness was part of her stock-in-trade—a valuable element of her charm, most carefully cultivated. 'The wretches say such vile things! Oh, sometimes, they're just *horrid*.' And she made a wry face, as if somebody had offered her a draught of nasty medicine.

'Still, the drawback to the actress's or singer's profession,' I mused on, in an abstract way—'viewed as a career, I mean—must be the effect it has on character.'

Mariana *faisait la moue*—I am afraid there is no English for it, nor indeed for most of Mariana's face-play. 'The effect it has on character! Oh, dear Rosalba, what on earth do you mean? Why, do you

know you are talking exactly like that poor dear John of yours? It must be catching. . . . Effect upon character! What a comical idea!' And she laughed her musical little laugh of disdain. 'As if one went upon the stage for its effect upon character!'

'When I see the influence the stage has upon some actors and actresses,' I went on calmly, 'it makes me *almost* decide for myself—to keep off it.'

'That's easily done, dear. It's one of the simplest professions to keep out of in the world.—Élise, *mon enfant*, would you make this bodice so that just a suspicion of a camisole—a dainty little coquette of a lace-edged camisole—should peep out at the neck? Cut low in a V. *Comme ça*—don't you think so?'

'Then you seriously advise me to decline the stage?' I went on, fingering the brocade gingerly.

'To decline it? My dear girl, who invited you to go on it?'

'I have a tempting offer,' I answered.

Mariana let the V-shaped bodice drop from her caressing fingers, and uttered a sharp cry of startled surprise, which would have been worth money in *Lucia*. 'You! An offer!' she almost shrieked. 'Rosalba! How disgraceful! It is an infamy—an infamy! To trade upon my name and artistic reputation!'

'It is a very splendid offer for a beginner,' I continued, in a casual voice, holding the brocade to the light as if its texture interested me. 'Twenty guineas a week; with a rise if I catch on. That's not so bad, is it?'

Mariana gasped and stared. 'Are you mad?' she said at last, with her full neck craned forward, 'or has somebody been imposing upon you?'

'Neither,' I replied carelessly, examining the threads of the brocade and turning it over in the light. 'This is a *bona fide* offer.'

My sister clutched my arm. 'My dear child,' she exclaimed, in a profoundly shocked undertone, 'you have no idea what sort of men these theatrical agents are. Some of them are wretches—wretches. They will offer you anything till they get you in their clutches. Then, they take advantage of your guileless nature. You have allowed them to deceive you. 'Tis your innocence—your innocence!'

'That 's just what my manager said,' I replied, with an infantile smile like Mariana's own. (After all, there is a wonderful underlying family likeness in sisters!) 'He said'—and I mimicked his cracked voice, bitter sarcasm and all—'"Innocence! Innocence! To get your agreement stamped at Somerset House! Innocence, quotha, innocence!"'

Mariana's grip on my arm was like a steel vice. 'Burminster!' she cried, in a voice of horror—for she recognised the squeaky unctuousness of the accent—'Burminster! You have seen him!'

'Yes, dear. No agents for me! Why pay ten per cent. to somebody else for doing ill what you can do well yourself for nothing? I have got Mr. Burminster's agreement duly stamped in my pocket. John was always strong to you on the necessity for getting your agreements stamped. It

is money out of hand, but it shows people you mean it.'

She drew back, incredulous. 'Rosalba, you are jesting!'

'Never more serious in my life, dear.—What an exquisite colour!—Twenty guineas, *and* prospects.'

'But you are unknown—an amateur. And Burminster, who has the pick of the talent of London—in his own odious line! I refuse to believe it.'

'Behold this walrus tooth!' I answered, after King Alfred's Olaf, producing the agreement, with its little red government mark in the corner. 'Rosalba Lupari;—Henry Delamere Burminster;—mutually agreed;—twenty guineas weekly;—in witness whereof;—all perfectly regular!'

She read it, and handed it back to me as white as the sheet on which I now write these words. There is nothing the regular profession hates like music-halls. 'This is abominable!' she cried; 'disgraceful! *My* sister to tread those boards! You two have hatched a conspiracy against me. *È iniquo, iniquo!* I knew you were unprincipled, Rosalba! I knew you were wicked——'

'Your guileless nature! Your innocence! You have allowed them to deceive you!' I murmured in Mariana's own voice.

She took no notice, continuing her angry harangue. 'But I never knew you would turn against me like this. *Dio mio!* It is positively shameful. I shall never speak to you again.'

'What? Neverer than before?' I murmured, for I knew that threat.

She went on, unheeding. 'I shall apply for a *mandamus* or a *habeas corpus* or something to prevent you. An injunction, I think it is called. I know the judges can grant one.'

'Some loops of Honiton would look nice,' I interposed sweetly, handling the bodice; 'don't you think so?'

Mariana was the tragedy queen. 'Here am I'—she rolled it out in her penetrating voice—'a singer on the highest operatic stage; by dint of hard work I have gained my position; and now Burminster comes to you, a creature in the music-hall line—a contractor for tight-rope dancers and performing dogs—and offers you a bribe to sell him your name—*my* name—to drag in the dirt on the floor of his vile places among the cigarette ends and the orange-peel. I shall protest against it, I will. It's . . . it's an abominable outrage!'

I do not care to bandy adjectives. So I let her go on for twenty minutes;—I love Mariana as Constance in *King John* — then I pocketed my agreement, waved my hand to her, and left. But if you ask me *why* I got up this gratuitous little scene, I can only answer, 'twas my devil who suggested it.

It *was* rough on Mariana; I admitted it to myself as I went back to Auntie's. Naturally, she objected to my taking to an inferior branch of the profession which she adorned, and so spoiling her artistic and social future. But I had my living to earn. And

besides, I chose to give Mariana this fright, because I thought it might act as a moral shower-bath. Shower-baths are so good for one: the nervous shock and so forth! Mariana lives too much in cotton wool—asparagus and chicken-cutlets;—occasional contact with the realities of life is a useful tonic.

The second was John. He had promised to come round to Auntie's that afternoon, on a matter of business. I had begged him earnestly to give me a little note, as far as he could recover it, of all the sums he had spent on my education and keep—'the ducats, John, the mere ducats'—and of course he had refused—for John is a gentleman. But when I pointed out to him that it would only save me labour since otherwise I must go hunting up Miss Westmacott and calling at Peter Robinson's to ask for details, he gave way at last with evident reluctance. 'After all,' he said, 'your estimate'— for I had jumped at one—'is ridiculously in excess. If you want to know the truth, you may as well know it; 'tis a question altogether removed from the sphere of practical politics. You can never pay the amount: so I will tell you if you insist upon it, as near as I can conjecture. But recollect, Rosalba, I do it under protest.'

So he came in the afternoon and brought a rough draft of the calculation with him. 'It has distressed me to put it down in black and white, my dear girl,' he said, wincing; 'but since you demand it as a right, and choose to consider it as a debt, I have

stretched a point to oblige you. Though I have been more than repaid already, Rosalba, by many pleasant hours spent in your charming company.'

'Very nicely said, John,' I replied, dropping my admired curtsey. (John is famous for these formal old-fashioned compliments. They have a distinct flavour of Oxford donnishness.) 'But that pleasure was reciprocal. Fair exchange will not cover the outstanding debt. We have still the ducats to reckon with.' Since I had been relieved from the necessity for marrying John, I really began quite to like him.

He smiled at me most agreeably. John has excellent manners. 'But I do not expect repayment immediately,' he went on. 'You might give me a bill—to be met, let us say, on the Greek calends.'

'I could meet it sooner,' I replied demurely. 'In fact, I think I might begin to meet it on the calends now next ensuing.'

'The first of next month? My dear Rosalba, impossible!'

'Mariana earns her living—and more—on the stage. I am Mariana's sister.'

'Mariana! ah, yes, but her voice! her training! Mariana has genius. Don't deceive yourself, my dear child. It is not easy to earn money in London nowadays.'

'Oh, I don't know about that,' I answered lazily, as though it mattered little. 'If one has the artistic temperament, you understand—— Twenty guineas a week—that's a capital offer!'

'Twenty guineas a week! Only stars earn so

much. And you, to put it mildly, are a star of as yet uncertain magnitude. Shall we say, the tenth —provisionally?'

'My dear John! your astronomy is ungallant!'

'This is a question of business.'

'But surely Mr. Burminster must know best,' I exclaimed with my most provoking smile. '*He* puts me down at twenty guineas.'

'Politeness! His way of making himself agreeable to the Lupari's sister. It is one thing, Rosalba, to do these things as an amateur for the occasional amusement of one's private circle; quite another thing to appear as a candidate for the suffrages of the cold, critical public. Most amateurs find that out to their cost when they try to earn their living by their art. Burminster's praise was mere *blague*: a casual opinion dropped hastily in some drawing-room where you met him. The wicked old creature said it to be pleasant.'

'Then *why* did he put it on a stamped agreement?' I asked, pulling it out and looking at it as if it were something to which I attached the very slightest importance.

John's colour changed at once. 'An agreement?' he cried with a start. 'Let me see it!'

I handed it to him. 'I have followed your advice, you observe,' I said sweetly. 'I have had the thing stamped. I can't tell you, John, how many things I have learned from you!'

He read it from end to end with a face growing more and more serious at each clause, as he plodded

on through its business-like provisions. He saw Burminster meant it. Austerity! I never knew what the word meant before. His lips grew hard: his chin grew adamant. He handed the document back to me without a word of comment, but with a pained expression on his face that pained me.

'Splendid terms, aren't they?' I observed, playing with my châtelaine, but with a mist in my eyes—John was so genuinely shocked.

'Splendid terms—well, ye-es,' he answered slowly at last. 'And so they ought to be—a music-hall!' His tone became grave. 'It is much you have to sell, Rosalba—a young girl's life—a young girl's happiness—perhaps'—he winced at saying it, but he said it like a man, and I respected him for his frankness—'a young girl's innocence!' He took my hand in his and leant over towards me anxiously. 'I have no right, dear,' he went on, in quite a fatherly voice, 'to interfere with your life now; it is your own; dispose of it. But . . . I have been your guardian for some years, and I am still deeply interested in you. For your own sake, therefore, I beg you to reconsider this question before it is too late. You have left yourself a loophole of escape, I observe: avail yourself of it. I should never cease to regret it if you accepted this hateful, this odious offer. Above all, if you accepted it in order to repay *me*. Rosalba, I could not take the money so earned. I *could* not take it. It would be the price of a soul—of a pure soul, tainted. It might be the price of your life—it must be the price of that first bloom of your innocent

girlhood which we all so admire. Do not, do not destroy it. For your own sake, I implore you, decline this specious proposal. Decline it, dear child! Your future is dear to so many of us!'

I am not concerned to deny that tears stood in my eyes. I had not looked for this. Contrary to my expectation, John had transcended himself. I thought he would have been struck with horror at the idea that the girl whom he had designed for the honour of becoming Mrs. Stodmarsh should perform at a music-hall—a common, low London music-hall. I thought he would think of himself and the blow to his own dignity. Instead of that, he thought of *me* —the danger of it, the unworthiness. I felt it was sweet of him After all, John was a kind, good fellow!

Not but that I detected some faint undercurrent of the other feeling in him as he went on; but sense of the degradation for me was uppermost. It touched me to the heart. I saw how much he liked me. At last, I burst out laughing—to keep back my tears. 'John,' I cried, 'you are a dear! I will not trick you longer.—I am not going to accept this offer. I never meant to accept it. It is all a little comedy. I went to see Mr. Burminster because I felt sure I could earn money that way if I tried; and I wanted to show you I could really earn it. But I am not going on the stage—not even on the regular stage of the theatre: I feel there are sufficient reasons in my case to keep me off it. It is one of my *métiers*—but not the only one; and there, I should be poaching on Mariana's

preserves; I prefer to rear my own pheasants. Even if I do not take to music-halls, some other sphere of usefulness will be open to me, I am certain. When I signed this agreement, I took care to make it binding on Mr. Burminster, but not on me. That was because I never meant to avail myself of it. And one of the reasons why I did not mean to avail myself of it was because I felt it would be a bad return for all your endless kindness to me if I were to let the world see that the girl who was so long engaged to be your wife had gone to the music-halls. You are a proud man, John, and I should shrink from so humiliating you. I never meant to go; I only wished to prove to you that *if* I went, I could repay you.'

John wrung my hand hard. 'Thank you, Rosalba,' he answered; 'thank you! You have relieved my mind—for your own sake most. Do you know, now we stand on different terms, I think I like you better than ever.'

'I am sure I like *you* better, John.'

'And I believe you will repay me. I do not want the repayment. I can never use it myself. But I see you mean it, and I honour you for meaning it. Rosalba, you are a gentlewoman.'

'John, you are so kind, I almost feel as if I need not repay you.'

He bowed with his stately, antique courtesy. 'I am glad we have had this interview, my child. It sets things on a pleasanter basis between us. We can meet henceforth more frankly in society, with no sense of an estrangement.'

'Estrangement! On the contrary, this is our first *rapprochement*.'

'My dear little girl, how nice of you to say so! I have undervalued your good qualities.'

He looked quite handsome as he stood there, with his close-shaven face relaxed, his uncompromising chin less square than was its habit, and the *doctrinaire* corners of his official mouth unwontedly softened. I took a step forward. 'John,' I burst out, 'I declare I am quite fond of you! You were my guardian once, and I owe you a great deal—no, not the ducats'—for he made a little gesture of deprecation —'not the ducats, but gratitude. For the last time in my life—there can be no harm in it just this once as between ward and guardian—I am going to kiss you—spontaneously to kiss you.'

And I kissed him.

The third person to whom I showed the agreement was Dudu. He happened to drop in at Auntie's unexpectedly that evening. He happened to drop in unexpectedly most evenings, indeed—and I expected the unexpected. To say the truth, I waited for him.

His countenance fell when I showed him the document with great joy: and he fingered his moustache dubiously. 'O Dru!' he cried, in a voice of unspoken remonstrance.

'It is a lot of money,' I observed obliquely.

'Yes, I know; a lot of money: but still——'

And I have to repay John for all that he has spent on me.

'But, Dru! A music-hall!'

'Why not?' I tantalised him.

'Well, it's not quite the place——'

'The place——?'

'For you—a tender little wayside flower to wither in that odious atmosphere!'

'And what claim have *you* to object, sir?'

'Surely I must guard my future wife from all hateful influences!'

I tore up the agreement and clasped my hands above him, laughing. 'I did it to show John I could repay him if I would,' I cried—'and to tease my future husband!'

He caught me in his arms. And that was the only way Dudu ever proposed to me, or I accepted him.

CHAPTER XXVII

OF THE NATURE OF AN EPILOGUE

NEVERTHELESS, my resolve stood firm not to marry Dudu while that weight of debt to John still clung round my neck, a moral millstone. In a new and strictly commercial sense, I must be off with the old love before I was on with the new. John was a distinguished political economist; I felt bound to treat him on economic principles—though our last interview made me quite sensible that I might take my own time about it. Still, I was by no means despondent. Despair, you may have observed, is an emotion with which the gods have endowed me but poorly. 'I shall earn it somehow, Dudu,' I said, looking up at him with confidence in Auntie's drawing-room. 'I have the artistic temperament—and a testimonial from Ernest Renan.'

He laughed at me. 'Optimist!'

'It needs one optimist in a house,' I answered. 'One way or other I shall succeed. So I mean at once to set about it.' I may add, that the event has justified my rash prophecy.

You will think I refer to my musical comedies. That is not quite true. I did not begin by writing

for the stage, though of course the theatre in one form or another was a foregone conclusion. It was not till some years later that I produced *The Snake-Charmer.*

I had long been writing, of course, and the first thing I did was to try some of my tentative short stories on magazines—a plan which costs only the postage, and gives trouble to nobody except the editor—and he no doubt is paid for it. To my immense delight, my very first venture turned out successful. The editor not only printed my contribution—a feeble little tale, *Cecca's First Lover*—but also paid for it; he not only paid for it, but also asked for more. I gave him more; and as the French proverb says, 'his appetite grew with eating.' This was a good omen. I followed *Cecca* up, with Dudu's aid, and tried my fledgling flight in the open.

Of course I had written a novel. Every girl writes a novel. She writes about herself—how 'she is not like other girls'; and about her sisters and other pet aversions. Mine was a novel of art, with an artist for hero—which was odd, I felt now, for 'twas written while I was still engaged to John Stodmarsh. The hero ought therefore, in the fitness of things, to have been a political economist. But I doubt whether even Mrs. Humphry Ward could make political economy engaging in a hero. While I was John's betrothed, too, I had felt a certain natural delicacy about submitting this novel for Dudu's correction. I cannot think why, but there was something about

my hero which remotely suggested certain traits of Dudu's; his talk about art, for example, resembled singularly the talk about art I had heard and mimicked in the studio near Auntie's. No doubt it was coincidence. But now that Dudu and I had arrived at an Understanding, there remained no reason why I should be shy of showing it to him. I did show it to him; and Dudu said it was 'droll and melancholy.' He and I sat up half the night for many weeks after, burning the midnight electric light—I will not stoop to the base subterfuge of *oil*; I will tell the truth at all hazards—in altering and correcting that gawky, angular little maiden effort. It needed a master, for it was limp and lank, like a schoolgirl of 'the awkward age.' However, Dudu undertook to drape and strengthen it: he revised the artistic descriptions: and he also supplied not a few felicities of expression. In fact, when Dudu's hand had touched the pages, I quite fell in love with my own novel. It had a quality of mystery, like twilight on a moor. The studio talk, I know, too, was as real as life; while the young artist's aspirations—well, I may as well admit, they were simply Dudu.

We sent the manuscript to an enterprising young publisher in fear and trembling. The publisher's reader was faintly appreciative; he 'thought it might do,' but 'in the present depressed condition of the book-market' declined to commit himself. He recommended me to print it at my own expense—which was absurd. However, the publisher was a man of spirit, and plunged. I could have kissed that

publisher. You disapprove?—Set it down to my southern temperament.

The novel came out—under a prudent pseudonym. I thought so much was due to Mariana—at least for a first venture. She had fairly made her artistic name; it would be mean of me to trade upon it. My book burst upon the world at a dull moment. But it succeeded, for all that: mildly, modestly succeeded. I do not say that it set the Thames ablaze from Kew to Greenwich. These are crowded days—John had fully impressed that economic fact upon me; you need not only wit, but opportunity as well, to emerge in our time head and shoulders high above the common ruck of divine geniuses. I did not so emerge. The best I can say for myself is that a firm of photographers in Regent Street offered to take my portrait for nothing, and that *Men and Women of the Time* sent me a printed circular requesting me to fill up the blanks with my name, place of birth, and 'claims to distinction.' These are the substitutes for Fame in our century. Nevertheless, my book brought in money—not thousands, I admit, but an adequate return. I could pay Auntie easily for my board and lodging, and put aside a small sum towards my debt to John Stodmarsh.

My future was now assured. I had no doubt about that. Auntie's position helped me. I soon got plenty of magazine work, and a column to write weekly for a ladies' paper about 'Art and Artists.' It was mainly the gossip of the studios: but it paid. Wiser and abler writers than myself ten thousand

times over have gambled for years with Fate against a bare subsistence; Fortune treated me better, with unblushing favouritism: at twenty-one I was already earning a more than modest competence. I walked about with my feet on the clouds, like the quaint little people in the old Flemish pictures of the New Jerusalem.

When the first cheque from the ladies' paper came in, Dudu gazed at it wistfully. 'It makes me sad to see it, Dru,' he said, handling it with itching fingers, as though he longed to destroy it.

'Why so, dear boy?'

'Because—because I should like to earn everything for you; and as things go, if I marry you now, it will be *you* who will win the daily bread, not I. I *hate* your working!'

'It is not work,' I answered. 'It is pleasure. The gratification of an artistic play-faculty. Besides, it will be years before I have paid off John. By that time, no doubt, you will have attained the Academy —"Arthur Wingham, R.A." Sounds well, doesn't it?'

'Heaven forefend! Not so low!—But I don't want it to be years, Dru. I want you now—this very instant second minute!'

'Then you must wait, my dear boy.' I looked as wise as an owl. 'John Stodmarsh has claims upon me.'

He paused and mused. A bright idea struck him. 'Dru, I have a reversionary interest in my aunt Emily's property in Italy,' he broke in:—'that

property near Vicenza, you know, that I went out to look after when first I met you on the Monti Berici.'

'So I have heard you say,' I answered. 'But your aunt, dear good soul, has twenty years yet to live, I hope. She is health incarnate, like a patent-medicine advertisement. Don't let us reckon on that. I hate these calculations.'

'Yes, but a reversion is a reversion. If I insured my life, I might borrow money upon it; and I might lend you the money to repay John Stodmarsh; and then—don't you see?—what a glorious idea!—we might marry instantly.'

'And I to owe you the money?'

'Yes, darling—nominally, since you *will* be business-like. You are sure to earn it; and you could repay me if you wished. Though repayment, from you to me, would make no difference.'

I shook my head, not too firmly. 'But—that would be to repeat the same old blunder over again—to put myself under an obligation to you, as I have already put myself to John Stodmarsh.'

'No, no, Dru, darling; quite, quite different—because . . . you love me!'

I jumped at him with a kiss. 'Dudu,' I cried, 'that is *real* logic! John knows his Stuart Mill and his Jevons by heart, I believe; but he never strikes out a profoundly logical idea like that one. While you——' I let him hold me.

It was not till a year later that I wrote *The Snake-*

Charmer — that strange play of the land east of the sun and west of the moon, which made our fortune.

'So, after all,' you say, 'he *was* the man you were going to marry! And all this time you have been trying to deceive us!'

Not to deceive you, exactly, but to conceal things from you till the proper moment. Perhaps by now it may begin to dawn upon you that that *is* my Method.

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